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“‘Hallo!’ he shouted. ‘What’s all this row about?’”

Page 98.

MOBSLEY'S MOHICANS



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MOBSLEY'S MOHICANS

A Tale of Two Terms

BY

HAROLD AVERY

AUTHOR OF "THE DORMITORY FLAG," "THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE,"
"SOLDIERS OF THE QUEEN," "STOLEN OR STRAYED,"

ETC. ETC.

With Seven Illustrations by J. H. Bacon

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

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BY

J. W. Bacon.



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MOBSLEY'S MOHICANS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOP LANDING CRICKET MATCH.

IT seems only a week or so ago that I was always hearing myself spoken of as "young Dean;" yet this morning, when shaving, I noticed that my scalp was already sprinkled with lines of grey. The mention of that word "scalp" brings me at once to the subject of my story, in which will be set forth a true and authentic account of certain passages in the lives and adventures of two great Indian chiefs and their companion, a namesake and successor of that famous scout the intrepid "Hawk-eye."

Ever since the events happened which I am about to describe, it has been my intention to place them on record; and I am astonished to find that, while I have been looking round for a pen, and trying to lay my

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hand on some paper, something like twenty-five years have slipped away. It seems to me, therefore, rather advisable, if the tale is to be told, that I—"Uncas"—*Le Cerf Agile*—the last of Mobsley's "Mohicans" (for what has become of "Chingachgook," my father, and the rest of the tribe I cannot say)—should, without further delay, beat my tomahawk into a fountain pen, and straightway commence my story.

Hanover House Academy was not an educational establishment that had made a name in the world; at the time of which I write, its fame had possibly not spread much further than the baker's shop at the corner of the road. Perhaps the reader will think it rather rash, and a trifle cheeky, to attempt to palm off upon him a story of a place where there were no studies or Sixth Form, and only a dozen boarders and fifteen day boys; but with all its faults, Hanover House was "our school," and will ever remain so in the memory of that portion of a crowd of youngsters who have lived long enough to turn into men; and so I offer no apology for this attempt to hand down to posterity the name of my *alma mater*.

I think I can safely say that it all began with the great cricket match, North *versus* South, which, under the energetic management of Master Samuel Fraser,

was played on the top landing one hot, stuffy night in June. The boys' bedrooms were all on the third story; and up there under the roof, on which the summer sun had been beating all day long, it was a difficult matter to compose oneself to sleep. There was a great temptation to roam about in airy costumes, or to lean out of the window and blow peas at strolling cats. Mobsley, whose weird genius was always prompting him to do extraordinary things, came upstairs one evening with an empty wine-bottle under his arm, which he began to fill from the big water-can.

“What’s that for?” asked Fraser.

“Why,” answered the other, “in cold weather you take *hot*-water bottles to bed to warm you; so why, in hot weather, shouldn’t you have *cold*-water bottles to keep you cool?”

The idea seemed feasible enough; and though we jeered at the originator, each of us secretly wished that he had provided himself with a similar contrivance. In the morning, however, we were thankful we had not done so. The water in Mobsley’s bottle must have boiled, and the steam blown the cork out; at all events, he was obliged to give Hannah, the girl, sixpence and a portion of an agate seal to get her to dry his bed-clothes without reporting the disaster to Miss Trigg—

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the last-named lady being housekeeper and “deceased wife’s sister” of Mark Medlar, M.A., the principal of Hanover House Academy.

It was on the following night that the great cricket match took place.

“Phew!” said Fraser, as soon as Mr. Soper, the under-master, had put out the lights and retired downstairs. “I’m roasting; can’t you hear my skin crackling?”

Ready as we were on every possible occasion to oblige Fraser, neither Mobsley, Wood, nor I could say truthfully that we did; whereupon our comrade, with an impatient snort, threw off the bedclothes, and pulling on his trousers, announced his intention of “seeing what Bowden’s lot are up to.”

“Bowden’s lot” seemed equally indisposed to slumber. Bowden and Simpson were sitting up in their beds, sucking acid drops, and watching Gale bombarding Brewer with slippers, which the latter sought to ward off with an old umbrella. Fraser, poking his head round the door and beholding this performance, was immediately struck with a brilliant idea.

“I say!” he exclaimed, “come out on the landing, and let’s play cricket.”

“Cricket!” mumbled Bowden, rolling a mouthful of acid drops into his cheek; “what d’you mean?”

“ Why, what I say. We can easily make a ball, and we can stand that little portmanteau up on one end for a wicket, and the umbrella ’ll do for a bat. We’ll have a regular match, North *versus* South. You shall be captain of the South, Bowden, and I’ll be captain of the North.”

“ Will you give us first innings ? ”

“ We’ll toss up for it.”

“ No, we won’t,” answered Bowden, cramming the remainder of his acid drops into his mouth, and licking the inside of the paper bag. “ Shan’t play unless we have first innings.”

Fraser gave in, summoned the occupants of his own room, and began to pick up sides.

“ D’you think it’s quite safe ? ” asked Simpson.

“ Oh yes, safe as houses,” answered Fraser. “ Hannah told me the two Miss Springles and old Johnstone are coming to supper, so Medlar and Miss Trigg and Soper will all be down in the drawing-room.—Here, young Dean, go and tell ‘ Romulus ’ and ‘ Remus ’ to come.”

The gentlemen alluded to, though twins, were not actually the celebrated brethren remembered in connection with early Roman history. Their real names were John Jones and Arthur Jones, and their chief characteristic was that they were always squabbling,

and on the smallest pretext would fall on each other, and growl, and worry, and snap like two small terriers. Even then, as I approached their door, which was standing ajar, I heard the following conversation, carried on in strained and agitated voices,—

“Leave go, Arthur!”—“Leave go, John!”—“Well, you leave go!”—“Shan’t till you do!”—and so on.

The twins were sitting up in bed, each grasping the other by the back of the neck. It was the old dispute, which will never be settled by arbitration, and which war alone decides—the old, vexed question of one power encroaching on another’s territory, or, to state the case more definitely, of one boy taking up more than his fair share of a double bed. With some little difficulty I persuaded “Romulus” and “Remus” that their little hands were never made for the purpose of wringing each other’s necks, and they agreed to take part in the game. The wicket had already been pitched at the opposite end of the landing; a ball had been constructed out of a pair of stockings rolled up and bound round with string; a gas jet had been lit to give more light; and Bowden, armed with the old umbrella, was throwing himself into a scientific attitude of defence.

Never, I feel sure, in the records of cricket, have the

North been represented by a weaker team than on this memorable occasion. Mobsley was very little good ; I fear I was no better ; while Wood was absolutely worthless at games, and didn't know the difference between a leg-bye and a batting-glove. Fraser was our main-stay and only hope, and right nobly did he fill the responsible position which he was thus called upon to occupy. The captain arranged the fielders. I stood *long on* at the top of the stairs, Mobsley took *point*, while Wood had a sort of roving commission to make himself generally useful somewhere between *mid-off* and *third man*. Only one side was to field, and so Simpson agreed to umpire. Fraser glanced round to see that all was right, and then rolled up the sleeve of his nightshirt with an air of grim determination.

“No trial,” said Bowden, and straightway hit the bundle of stockings into the umpire’s eye, who querulously declared it was done on purpose, and was with difficulty restrained from carrying out his expressed determination of retiring from the game.

Now the struggle began in earnest, and fortune seemed to favour the South in the most barefaced manner. Wood buttered two easy catches ; and once the ball struck a loose strap of the portmanteau, which the umpire decided could not count as part of the

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wicket. We had agreed that all hits should be run out. In the second over the batsman cut the ball right into our bedroom. We hunted high and low, and at length, when Bowden's score had risen from 5 to 34, the missing bundle of stockings was discovered slowly drowning in the water-can. This incident rather raised our "dander." Fraser tried a new style of swift over-hand, and a few moments later took the rival captain's wicket.

So interested had we become in the game that Mobsley, Wood, and I sent up a simultaneous shout of "Bowled!" which rash proceeding was, under the circumstances, so alarming that one and all promptly fled to their respective rooms, leaving the portmanteau standing in the middle of the landing as though it had dropped there from the roof. No one, however, seemed to have overheard our unguarded ejaculation, and the players soon plucked up sufficient courage to return for a renewal of the contest.

Simpson came out for a duck, and "Romulus" made 6. "Remus" had the misfortune to be bowled first ball, but was inclined to dispute the umpire's decision.

"Go on—it was a trial; that's not out. Don't you think I could have hit that potty thing if I'd liked?"

"Go and bag your head, you silly chump!" said



"Fraser rolled up the sleeve of his nightshirt with an air of grim determination."

“Romulus” soothingly. “Come out, and don’t stand there speechifying.”

“Remus” came out, and a moment later there was a punching and scuffling somewhere behind the wicket, accompanied by the usual refrain: “Stop it, Arthur!”—“Well, you hit me first!”—“Well, stop it!”—“Well, *you* stop it!”—“Well, I shan’t stop it unless *you* stop it!” etc., etc.

Bowden eventually “stopped it” by bumping the two disputants’ heads together; then Gale went in, and was caught and bowled Fraser, after making three runs: and thus the South’s innings closed, with a grand total of 43.

It was now time for the hardy North to show what stuff they were made of, and Wood began the display by hitting his wicket. Mobsley followed, and during his innings a curious point of cricket law cropped up which we were never able to settle, and which I have often thought of submitting to one of the M.C.C. umpires, or some other authority, to learn what would have been their decision.

Mobsley hit the ball with such force that it came to pieces in its flight. The batsman ran; “Romulus” picked something off the ground and flung it to Bowden, who was wicket-keeping, and Mobsley was run

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out. Fraser, who was standing umpire, gave it “not out”—the reason for this decision being that Bowden had put down the wicket with a *single stocking*, whereas the ball consisted of a pair of stockings and a piece of string. Bowden and his team gathered round and expostulated, but the umpire remained firm: when stumping a man the wicket-keeper must have *the ball in his hand*; a mere fragment of it did not count. Fraser was certain that if Bowden had been wicket-keeping at Lord’s, and had put down one of the great players’ wickets with a single stocking instead of two stockings and a piece of string, it would have been given “not out.” The argument continued for some time, but eventually the South were obliged to give in.

I followed Mobsley, Brewer came next, and when “Remus” dispatched him with a smart catch at *point* our total score was 9. The South was triumphant—the jubilation of Simpson, a crack-voiced, shallow-pated fop, being specially exasperating. We had evidently “gone under;” yet Fraser did not think so, but seized the umbrella with an air of determination, and walked up to the wicket like Napoleon’s Old Guard marching forward with rolling drums and flying colours to retrieve the fortunes of the day. In vain did Bowden change

the bowling: our leader continued to score off nearly every delivery; three times running he cut the ball into our room. Simpson craftily closed the door; but this we would not allow, and Bowden was obliged to stand as fielder on the threshold.

The score mounted slowly from 10 to 20, and from 20 to 30; our excitement increased tenfold, and so intent were we on the game that our ears were deaf to any warning sounds rising from the hall two stories beneath. A moment or so later a shrill voice was speaking on the lower landing,—

“I’m so sorry you must be going! It’s really quite early. Next time you come you must stay longer.”

Miss Lydia Springles, a very prim lady of uncertain age, was about to reply, when suddenly and unexpectedly, descending like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, a pair of wet stockings hurtled through the air, and fell upon her cap and shoulders. Hardly had this happened when the figure of a small boy, clad in a night-shirt and a pair of knickerbockers, with legs bare from the knee downwards, and only one slipper on, came charging down from the upper landing, and, attempting to stop himself, tripped on the bottom step, and plunged head first into the centre of the group of horror-stricken ladies.

Miss Trigg gasped for breath, her visitors screamed ; but worse was still to follow. Fraser, with a splendid drive, had sent the ball clean down the staircase ; it had burst again on the way. The North wanted only 7 more to win, and "Run it out !" was the cry. "Romulus" had dashed after the ball, and did not return.

"Go and help him find it !" screamed Bowden. "Remus," Gale, and Simpson all sprang to do their captain's bidding, and in a moment an avalanche of white-robed, barefooted figures came thumping down the stairs, literally overwhelming Miss Trigg and her astonished guests !

So ended the famous upper landing cricket match, North *versus* South ; and after a short interval, the second part of the entertainment began. Miss Trigg's sharp tongue cut like a two-edged sword ; Mr. Medlar himself appeared on the scene, solemn and awe-inspiring, and we trembled as his deep voice spoke our doom,—

"All of you boys come to me after dismissal to-morrow ; bring with you your slates and arithmetics."

After all this excitement, and with the room still like an oven, it was impossible to sleep, and we lay awake talking.

In describing the occupants of the four beds, I can say at once that Wood was a moon-faced nonentity, who had not even wit enough to make him an amusing jackass. Mobsley, on the other hand, had impressed me from the first as being rather an extraordinary individual—chiefly, I imagine, at the commencement of our acquaintance, from the fact of his possessing a remarkable assortment of picture handkerchiefs, and his seeming to suffer from chronic toothache. He was a dreamy boy, with a strong and fantastic imagination; and whether most of the stories he was constantly telling us came out of books or were of his own invention, we could none of us definitely decide. He was a patient, good-natured youngster, and the incongruous though pitiful sight of his swollen face, bound round with a gaudy representation of the adventures of “Ten Little Nigger Boys,” haunts me still. Poor Mobsley! I hope by this time he has “passed the chair”—that horrible chair of torture; that his miserable teeth have been replaced by a double set of artificials; and that he has no longer any need of the pepper plasters and innumerable little bottles of strong-smelling drugs with which he sought to combat that relentless enemy of youth.

Fraser was a sturdy, bright-faced boy of fourteen,

of a very enterprising turn of mind, and blessed with elastic spirits which never seemed to fail; though I must admit that there were times when life at Hanover House was very dull and depressing. Fraser was my beau-ideal of what a schoolboy ought to be; I felt sure that if he had lived in a book he would have fought town roughs, bullied the bully, fallen in love with the head-master's daughter, and rescued her from a fire which would have burned the premises. So, perhaps, it comes about that Fraser *does* appear in a book, but how far short he falls of the regulation hero it will be for the reader to decide.

Lastly there was myself—"young Dean," an insignificant youth, not very strong, and not, I am afraid, very brave, except when love for Fraser—the intrepid "Hawk-eye"—prompted me to daring deeds which I should otherwise never have dreamt of attempting. Of the other boarders, "Romulus" and "Remus" have already been described, while of Gale and Brewer there is nothing to be said of any importance. Bowden was a cross-grained lout, whose life and talents seemed to be largely devoted to eating, and rendering himself objectionable to his comrades. His hands and face always appeared to be sticky, as though he had been handling half-melted butter-scotch, while his unwieldy

body obtruded itself as a stumbling-block in the path of all our plans and pleasures. Scarcely less desirable as a schoolfellow was his friend Simpson. The latter hailed from a small village named Tutfield, where (so we were given to understand) his father ruled as a sort of feudal lord ; and the never-ending stories of his own grand doings we were sick of hearing. Simpson was a bloated aristocrat : he received a shilling a week pocket-money ; and somehow a millionaire like that is always a person who ought to be blown up with dynamite. Bowden was the only person who benefited by this wealth. From the commencement of the term he had taken the new boy under his wing, and now, every Saturday, accompanied him to the grub shop, and there assisted in spending what seemed to us a magnificent allowance.

“Oh, bother it !” said Fraser, throwing off his bed-clothes. “I can’t sleep ; I’m simply roasting. It must be nearly one o’clock.”

He scrambled out of bed, walked to the window, and leaned out, softly whistling. A moment later he drew his head back with a muttered exclamation of surprise, “I say, come here—quick !”

Wood was asleep, but Mobsley and I hopped out, and were beside him in an instant.

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“There’s some one with a lamp knocking about among the shrubs—there—d’you see?”

In the dark mass of the dense and untrimmed shrubbery which ran down the right side of the garden a gleam of light appeared, and vanished like the flash of a bull’s-eye lantern.

“Who can it be?” said Mobsley.

“I dun’no,” answered Fraser. “Perhaps it’s Dick Adams; though what he’s doing here at this time of night I don’t know. There—there ’tis again. Shall I call?”

The light did not appear again; everything was quiet, and we retired to bed, little thinking that this was the beginning of a mystery, and the foreshadowing, as it were, of events unparalleled in the somewhat uneventful history of Hanover House Academy.

CHAPTER II.

WE PETITION FOR A PLAYING-FIELD.

THE famous match, North *versus* South, had taken place on a Monday, and two days later Fraser was suffering from an acute attack of cricket fever, to account for which it will be necessary to give a short description of our school premises.

In one of the suburbs of the manufacturing town of Stockingham is a comparatively quiet byway known as Carlsham Road ; about fifty yards up from the confectioner's shop at the corner is—or was—a length of low brick wall surmounted by iron railings, and a few yards back from this stood Hanover House Academy. Behind the house was a ragged and unkempt garden, down the right-hand side of which ran a thick shrubbery. Traversing the path on the left, one came to the playground, a sort of large pen, covered with muddy gravel, and surrounded by tarred boards, on which boys cut their initials and then rubbed dirt into the letters

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so that they might not look too new, as this kind of wood-carving, if detected, was generally rewarded with a half-crown fine.

Close outside the back entrance to the schoolroom stood a building which was really an old coach-house and stable knocked into one, to form what Mr. Medlar called a covered playground; while what had once been a harness-room was now used as a cloak-room for the day boys. In this place, on whole school days, when the weather was wet, we played fearful games of “Hi-cock-a-lorum!” a vivid recollection of which still lingers in my mind. To have some big fellow take a flying leap and descend like a ton of bricks in the middle of one’s back was not over-pleasant for a youngster with more bones than beef in the make-up of his small “cass;” the weight would be increased by two or three more jumpers, there would be a tottering of feeble knees, and then a collapse on to the hard cobble stones, followed by a burst of laughter and a yell of “Weak horses!”

Above the stable was an old dimly-lighted loft, of which more will be said as our story progresses. The ladder had disappeared, but it was possible, by means of the broken hayrack and a big nail driven into the wall to form a step, to climb up and gain access to the

upper story through an opening in the floor. On whole school days, from 4 to 5.30 p.m., when work was finished, we mooned about between the schoolroom and the stable, and the stable and the playground; while on half-holidays we sometimes went a walk under the charge of Mr. Soper. In one way Mr. Medlar was hardly to blame for the fact of our not having any better employment for our free time. He was a grave, scholarly man, who had probably never played a game of cricket or football in his life; and for this reason it never occurred to him that such amusements were at all necessary.

Fraser, however, thought differently. The great match, North and South, had stirred his restless spirit, and after breakfast on Wednesday morning he perched himself on the back of the iron seat in the playground and harangued us with unusual animation.

"We ought to play cricket," he said, "and have matches like other schools. Why can't Medlar hire this next field from old Greenaway? We might have a little wooden pavilion, and after a bit we might have a bicycle track laid down. There, now, what a good idea! I'd send for my bike. I wonder how much it would cost to have it sent here? I think I'll write and ask."

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“Before you send for your bicycle,” said “Romulus,” “perhaps you’d better make certain about the field.”

“Well, that’s just what we are going to do,” answered Fraser. “We must have a field and play cricket. Now, how’s it to be done?—What d’you say, Mobsley?”

Every one was always ready to make fun of Mobsley, yet when there was any difficult problem to be solved, his advice was invariably solicited. He stood for a moment, thoughtfully sucking the end of an old metal penholder.

“As far as I can see, there’s only one thing to be done,” he answered, “and that is to send a petition to old Medlar asking him to get us a field.”

“That isn’t a bad notion,” said Fraser. “If we draw up a petition, will you all sign it?”

“I won’t,” answered Bowden. “We should only get into a row; and, besides, what do we want with a wretched field?”

“Last summer at Tutfield,” began Simpson, “the vicar asked me to start a cricket club for the choir boys. I made the guv’nor lend us one of his fields, and I worked the thing up so that we licked Tutfield, though they’d got a ‘pro’ playing for them. I made seventy-four, not out, and—”

“Oh, dry up!” wailed Fraser. “When you start

telling bangers, you never know when to stop. If you go on to the second innings, you'll say you made 493, and bowled everybody first ball.—Look here, Mobsley: you go and draw up that petition, and then every one who wants to play can sign it."

With a look of grave responsibility upon his face Mobsley retired to the schoolroom, there to prepare the important document. It was necessary that it should be written on suitable paper, and he therefore tore the two middle sheets out of a special exercise book provided by the head-master for our compositions. When finished, this historical production read as follows:—

"This is to certify that we, the undersigned, do here-with beg, request, entreat M. Medlar, Esq., M.A., that he will hire, borrow, or buy a field, meadow, or portion of grass-land, on which we, his scholars, pupils, and disciples, may exercise, disport, and amuse ourselves with the great national pastime of cricket.

"*N.B.*—We think the field belonging to Mr. Greenaway, and situated at the back of the playground, would be suitable for the purpose indicated."

Fraser read the petition with a dissatisfied frown.

“What d’you want to keep putting two or three words where one would do, you silly chump ?”

“It’s always like that in law papers,” answered the author. “They always put in several words meaning the same thing. Look—‘the great national pastime,’ and ‘suitable for the purpose indicated:’ that isn’t bad, is it? I thought of it all myself. There’s one thing: I ought to have ended, ‘And thy petitioners will ever pray.....’”

“Pray for what? We don’t want to go on praying for ever if we get the field.”

“No; but it’s what’s always put,” answered Mobsley, “so it must mean something.”

You may have heard of the “Petition of Rights,” and of the American “Declaration of Independence;” you will no doubt often have come to grief when asked to give the date of a thing called MAGNA CHARTA; but the signing of either of these important documents could not, I feel assured, have been conducted in a more serious and formal manner than was the ceremony when we affixed our signs manual to Mobsley’s petition. Every one wrote his worst and most shaky hand. Fraser forgot to add his usual flourish, and “Romulus” somehow got three *r*’s into the word Arthur. Bowden and Simpson signed last, and did so

with a sneer, in order that they might feel at liberty to crow over us if the thing came to the ground.

So far so good. Fraser declared that the cricket field was practically won. But now it was that misfortune began to dog the steps of the projectors of the scheme. Mobsley's mind was so full of his literary masterpiece that he could not give a proper amount of attention to his work. In a Latin exercise of nine sentences he managed to have twenty-seven mistakes, and consequently was ordered to remain at his desk and correct them during interval. Fraser carried the petition down into the playground, and, mounting the iron seat, addressed the crowd.

"This is a thing," he said, "which concerns everybody, because when we get the field, of course day boys will be able to play there as well as boarders. We've put up with this rotten little yard long enough, and it's high time we had something better. We must all stand together, and be determined that nothing shall interfere with—"

"Fraser, go to music!" shouted a voice.

"Bother!" cried the orator. "Well, all you day kids must sign this. I'll give it to Marsden.—Here's my pocket ink-bottle. You see that they all stick down their names."

In school order Marsden sat next to our head boy.

“All right!” he answered, with a grin; “hand it here.”

When the school was dismissed at half-past twelve, it being a half-holiday, the day boys went home, and the boarders repaired once more to the playground. As he left the schoolroom, Marsden had handed back the petition, saying simply,—

“There you are! They’ve all signed it.” The envelope which contained the document was sealed.

“Now, then,” said Fraser, “I vote we go straight away and give it to old Medlar.”

“He’s in rather a wax because no one could do that sum about those beastly men walking from A to B,” murmured Brewer. “Hadn’t we better leave it till the afternoon?”

“No,” answered Fraser. “He who hesitates is lost! I’m not afraid of old Mark; come along!”

We started—that is, all except Bowden and Simpson, who never even got as far as that; going up the path Wood dropped behind; a little further on Brewer and Gale left the procession and sneaked off into the stable; “Romulus” and “Remus” followed us into the house, then their courage failed them, and they fled. I should have liked to follow their retreat; but Fraser, like

the Ancient Mariner, "held me with his glittering eye," and I had no choice but to follow.

We knocked at the library door. Mr. Medlar was seated at his writing-table, and peered at us over his glasses with something like a frown.

"Well, what d'you want?" he asked sharply.

"Please, sir," answered Fraser briskly, "will you be so kind as to read this?"

The master tore open the envelope with an impatient snort. Mobsley's fingers twitched nervously. I knew he was thinking of "the great national pastime" and "suitable for the purpose indicated."

Old Mark's forehead contracted into a heavy frown.

"What's the meaning of this nonsense?" he demanded.

"Please, sir, it isn't nonsense; it's—"

"But I say it *is* nonsense, and most impertinent nonsense into the bargain, and I wish for an explanation."

"It's a proper petition, sir," faltered Mobsley; "it's—"

"A proper petition! rubbish! What's the meaning of all this?"

The speaker thrust the paper back into Fraser's hand. I was standing close to the latter, and saw at a glance what was indicated. Stars and comets! We had been basely betrayed. Marsden had turned the whole thing

into a jest, and after Simpson's name appeared the autographs of Guy Fawkes, Uncle Tom, Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck, Robinson Crusoe, and a long list of other celebrities, ending with the preposterous signature, "Little William and his dog Cæsar."

It was no laughing matter. We all trembled. Fraser stammered out an assurance that the latter part of the document was not our doing, and it was entirely without our knowledge that "Uncle Tom" and "Perkin Warbeck" had indorsed the petition.

"Who wrote it?" asked Mr. Medlar.

"Please, sir, I did," answered Mobsley.

"And where did you get the paper from?"

"Please, sir—please, sir—ou—out of my composition book."

"Just as I expected. Very well, sir, you will go to your seat after dinner, and write, five hundred times, 'I must not tear leaves out of my book.' Now go."

Even when defeat had thus been transformed into regular rout, Fraser's heart did not entirely fail him; he made one last attempt to gain his end.

"Please, sir, will you get us a field?"

"Certainly not! you have already got a play-ground."

Slowly we retraced our steps to the little dusty yard,

where our comrades awaited our return. Then Fraser gave vent to his feelings, and, addressing the company, called them sneaks, muffs, grinning apes, and a number of other uncomplimentary things.

“It was Arthur’s fault I didn’t come,” said “Remus;” “he pulled me back.”

“That’s all stuff,” answered “Romulus.”

“Look here, John Jones, I’ll smack your head!”

“You mean I’ll smack yours.”

“No, I don’t. Take that!”

“And you take that!”

“Shut up, John!”

“Shut up yourself!”

“Well, you shut up!”

“Well, *you* shut up!”

“I knew very well how it would be,” cried Simpson, interrupting the fraternal dispute. “If you’d asked me, in the first place, I’d have advised you to go about it altogether in a different way. What I should have done would have been to go to Medlar in a sensible manner—”

“Oh yes; I fancy I see you doing it!” burst out Fraser. “I can just imagine you going to Medlar in a sensible manner. You always sneak away into a corner when anything’s got to be done, you miserable skunk!”

Simpson had begun to imagine that because he had secured Bowden's friendship he was therefore rather a fine fellow, and able to pat the other boarders on the head.

"Look here, Fraser, don't you cheek me," he answered haughtily; "I'm not going to be called names by a kid like you."

The speaker was certainly a little the taller of the two, but Fraser was the same age, and of a much stouter build. That "kid" was a dangerous mistake: Simpson was dropping lighted matches into gunpowder; in another moment it would have "gone off," and probably singed his eyebrows. Fraser clenched his fist and sidled up to his adversary, growling like an angry terrier, and a breach of the peace would certainly have occurred if at that moment a strange voice had not exclaimed,—

"Now then, now then! 'Let dogs delight to lark and fight.' Haven't you never heard that before?"

We all turned round, and saw the head of a strange man appearing above the boarding which divided the playground from the next garden. He had a sharp, foxy-looking face, with eyes too close together, black hair, and small coachman's whiskers; and though the rest of his face was clean shaven, his beard gave a dark, bluish tinge to the skin of his cheeks and chin.

“‘Let dogs delight to lark and fight,’” repeated the stranger, with a grin. “That’s what the little ’ym said that we used to learn when I was a lad.”

“Who are you?” asked Bowden.

“Who am I?” returned the man. “Why, I’m old Mr. Greenaway’s cook and butler and footman and gardener and general handy-man all rolled into one; that’s what I am.”

“But what’s become of Dick Adams?” inquired half a dozen voices.

“Dick Adams got the sack,” answered the man.—“Hullo! there is the old chap a-ringing his bell. I must go and see what he wants.”

“Dick Adams got the sack!” ejaculated Fraser.
“What a shame!”

The house next door was always regarded by us with a certain air of mystery. It was called Ashgrove, probably for no other reason than the fact of its being surrounded by chestnut-trees. It had a fair-sized garden, and the field at the back of our playground was also a portion of the property. The owner, Mr. Greenaway, was an eccentric old bachelor, who was said to cherish a great aversion to the fair sex, and in consequence his household consisted of only one man-servant, who cooked, made the beds, looked

after the garden, and, in short, did everything. Dick Adams, who had hitherto held this post, was a great favourite with us, and we always welcomed the appearance of his cheery face above the boarding. Old Greenaway we regarded with a mixture of awe and aversion. Occasionally we met him out walking, arrayed in a shapeless felt hat of gigantic proportions, and a sort of black cloak, which, but for the colour, might have suggested the idea that in going out he had hastily caught up a table-cloth and flung it over his shoulders. He had no liking for boys, and always scowled at us as we passed. Mobsley introduced him into stories which he told in the bedroom after the lights had been put out, and in which the neighbouring house was supposed to possess secret chambers, sliding panels, and underground passages.

Sometimes, when Dick Adams was in a mood to be communicative, we would ask him questions about the place and its owner.

“Aw, well there, it’s a nice ‘ouse,” he would say, “and chock-full of koorioes, the rummiest things you ever saw, and some of ‘em worth a lot of money, I’ll be bound! The master spends all his time over’auling them and reading of his books, morning, noon, and night, and sometimes he don’t go to bed till close on daybreak.”

“But, Dick, aren’t there any underground passages or secret chambers up in the chimneys ?”

“No, there’s nothing down below but the cellar,” Dick would answer. “And there ain’t nothing in the chimblies —that I know, because they was only swep’ last week.”

It being a half-holiday, Fraser and I got leave that afternoon to go into the town. We wandered down the road in gloomy silence. The failure of our petition was still fresh in our minds ; even then Mobsley was in durance vile writing his lines. In addition to this, we were not so well off for friends at Hanover House that we could afford to lose one, and the news of Dick Adams’s dismissal was very depressing. Dick had always been a friend to us ; he had never objected to our crawling through a hole under a portion of the boarding when balls, tops, or other property flew over into the next garden ; and he always collected the horse-chestnuts for us, and, in fact, had kept some a whole year hung up the kitchen chimney, in order that we might triumph over the day boys. Those were “coblles,” if you like ! Nothing could stand against them. “Romulus” had one that proved the victor in twenty-three encounters, and each time came up to scratch as fresh as a daisy, with hardly a scratch in its hard brown skin.

"I wonder what old Greenaway wanted to sack Dick for?" grumbled Fraser. "I don't like the look of this new beggar."

We strolled on until we came to a large iron gate which opened into the cricket ground of the Stockingham Grammar School. Two games were in progress on the large, level field, and it was with a feeling of envy that we watched the boys in their white flannels and smart caps, and listened to the musical clack of the bats.

For some moments we leaned against the gate in moody silence; then Fraser pushed his cap on to the back of his head, and turned to me with an air of determination.

"Look here, young Dean: we're going to play cricket same as those chaps there; and, somehow or other, I'm going to get a field. There's one other thing that's got to be done," he added, turning from the gate, "and that is, we must sit on Simpson!"

CHAPTER III.

A TEA-MEETING IN THE LOFT.

WE were to play cricket, and Simpson was to be sat on—the mouth of Fraser had spoken it; and, as it happened, in the course of our attempt to carry out the first-named intention, we were led, quite unexpectedly, to accomplish the latter.

The sight of the Grammar School playing-field had made Fraser more than ever determined that we should abandon loafing, and engage in some proper game. On Friday he began to agitate, and an open-air mass meeting of the boarders took place round the iron seat in the playground.

“Look here!” said Fraser: “we must club together and buy some things, and start playing here. Then, when Medlar sees we are in earnest about it, perhaps he’ll get us a field. Now, who’ll subscribe?—What’ll you give, Simpson?”

“Nothing,” answered Simpson. “Give it yourself!”

“Who’ll subscribe?” repeated Fraser.

There was a silence, broken only by some one murmuring that “Mr. Soper ought to be good for sixpence.”

“Well, we’ve got to raise the tin somehow,” cried Fraser; “now, how are we going to do it?—Mobsley, you’re the chap with ideas; suggest something.”

Mobsley had had a touch of toothache that morning, and his melancholy face was bound up in a representation of the “Wreck of the *Hesperus*.” He remained for a moment thoughtfully grinding his heel into the gravel, and then, looking up, said solemnly,—

“*A tea-meeting.*”

“WHAT?” shouted Fraser.

“A tea-meeting,” repeated Mobsley.

Every one exploded. Simpson, whose honeyed laugh resembled the sound of a tin box falling downstairs, simply roared, until even Bowden thumped him on the head to induce him to restrain his merriment.

“I mean what I say,” repeated Mobsley. “It’s what people always do when they want money: everybody buys tickets, and then the proceeds go to the object they’re working for. Let’s have a tea-meeting up in the loft, and charge threepence a ticket.”

The audience now saw that there was at least some method in Mobsley’s madness.

“ Well, I don’t think it’s a bad idea ! ” said Fraser ; while Bowden, who cared little for cricket, but took a keen interest in all matters connected with eating and drinking, was also inclined to favour the suggestion.

“ Let’s do it , ” he exclaimed ; “ it’ll be a rare lark. I haven’t got any cash myself, but Simpey’ll pay for my ticket.”

“ Simpey ” didn’t seem altogether pleased with this latter remark, but his friend overruled his objection ; and pocket-money having been given out that morning, it was decided that every one should pay up there and then. A collection was therefore made on the spot, with the result that half a crown was handed to Mobsley, who acted as treasurer.

“ The next question , ” said the latter, “ is, who’s to decide what grub to buy ? We ought to elect a committee to get the stuff and make arrangements.”

The audience were all now thoroughly interested in the scheme, and when it came to choosing the committee, everybody nominated everybody else. “ Romulus ” and “ Remus ” named Mobsley and Fraser, who returned the compliment ; Bowden voted for Simpson, and Simpson thought Bowden was the man for the job ; while Brewer, Gale, Wood, and myself exchanged similar courtesies.

"Well, this is rot!" said Fraser abruptly. "We can't all be on the committee."

"Oh, of course you must manage it all yourself!" answered Simpson crossly. "I don't want to be on your howling committee, and I should think no one else does."

"I propose that Fraser, and Mobsley, and young Dean get the grub," said "Romulus." "I don't see it matters who buys it, as long as we're all there to help eat it."

The proposition was carried; and we three were therefore empowered to lay out the funds, and make the necessary arrangements for the feast. Never, before or since, has it been my lot to share in a task of such grave responsibility as the spending of that half-crown. We lay awake that night speculating on what we ought to get, and the subject haunted us in our dreams. We filled sheets of scribbling-paper with calculations, and the question as to whether jam should or should not be included in the bill of fare nearly caused a rupture in our long friendship. At length the *menu* was decided on—cake, biscuits, jam, and cocoa. "Romulus" and "Remus" had a lamp and kettle, which they lent us for the occasion; and the last twopence was paid to them for the remains of a bottle of spirit to fire up with.

The exciting function was to take place on Saturday afternoon, and at four o'clock we assembled in the stable with the various materials for the feast.

I am not a superstitious man—I do not fear to be thirteen at table, or to look at the new moon through glass ; but there was positively something so uncanny in the way in which misfortune dogged our steps whenever we attempted anything in connection with that cricket club, that I cannot but conclude that, for the time being, the Fates themselves were against its formation.

I have mentioned before that the ladder which had formerly been fixed against the wall had now disappeared, and that we gained admission to the loft, after a somewhat precarious climb, by an opening in the floor through which hay had been pushed down into the rack. Fraser led the way with the cake, next came Mobsley with the biscuits, after him "Romulus" with the jam-pot, and then "Remus" prepared to follow with the kettle.

Exactly what took place next, and how it happened, no one will ever know ; as an eye-witness of the catastrophe, I can only give what seems to me the correct explanation. As Mobsley scrambled through the opening in the ceiling, the paper bag in his hands caught

against the boards and broke. For an instant the skies seemed to rain down biscuits; a perfect torrent of them descended on the head of Arthur Jones, who, startled at such an unusual occurrence, let go his hold, and fell off the manger on to the top of his brother, who was just preparing to mount. Together they rolled upon the ground. As nicely as if it had been a jelly from a mould, "Romulus" turned out the greater portion of the jam on the centre of "Remus's" waistcoat, while the latter retaliated by emptying the contents of the kettle over the other's head. Then, covered with jam and water, they rolled among our biscuits. 'Twas a woeful sight, though it lasted only for a moment.

"What on earth has happened?" cried Fraser from aloft.

The answer came in a sound of scuffling, and half-weeping voices exclaiming, "'Twas your fault."—"No, it wasn't."—"Take that!"—"And you take that!"—"Shut up, Arthur."—"You shut up."—"I'll smack your head."—"And I'll smack yours," etc.

It is no good crying over spilt milk, much less fighting over it. We dragged "Romulus" and "Remus" apart; most of our jam was spread on their clothes, and the biscuits were nearly all dirty and unfit to eat. Fraser looked down through the opening in the ceiling,

and remarked that it was lucky we'd got the cake left, and that we'd better come on up and begin.

We ascended to the banqueting-chamber, where we squatted on the floor in a circle. The array of drinking-vessels was rather curious, and consisted of a round tin box, three jam-pots, four tooth-water glasses, a soap-dish, and a hollow crock ornament representing a broken shepherd leaning against the trunk of a tree: this vessel Wood had brought from our bedroom mantelpiece, saying it was the best thing he could find.

To boil water on a lamp stove is a job which never seems lacking in interest. The smell of the spirit always reminds me of snapdragon, model steam-engines, fire-balloons, and a host of other interesting things. We sat round in the semi-twilight of the loft, watching the blue flame, and listening for the first note of the kettle's song. There was in this proceeding something sufficiently romantic to fire Fraser's imagination.

“I say!” he exclaimed, “we might imagine that this is a cave, and we're a band of robbers cooking our evening meal. We have just waylaid a nobleman's carriage crammed full of gold and jewels, and now we've come back with our pockets stuffed with plunder, and—oh, bother it—the fire's gone out!”

It was only too true: the flickering flame of the lamp

had sunk, and then expired; there was not a drop more spirit left in the bottle.

A groan followed this announcement. Mobsley lifted the lid of the kettle, and put in his finger.

“The water’s warm,” he said. “We’d better make haste and drink it before it gets cold.”

We hastily served out a ration of cocoa and luke-warm water, and handing round the solitary spoon, proceeded to mix the beverage in the various drinking-vessels. I must confess it was the most nauseous compound I ever tasted. After several gulps Wood put down the crock ornament.

“I say,” he murmured, “this is awful sickly stuff; it makes me feel queer. Are we obliged to drink it?”

“This is the rottenest tea-meeting I ever heard of,” grumbled Simpson. “I call it a waste of money. Let’s try the cake.”

The cake was a success, and put the company into a better humour.

“After a tea-meeting there’s always speeches,” remarked “Romulus.”—“Fraser, you ought to say something.”

Fraser was always ready to oblige, and at once started off, hardly waiting to finish his last mouthful.

“Gentlemen, you are all acquainted with the object

of the present gathering, which is to raise funds for buying materials for our cricket club. We have, as it were, taken the first step in the right direction; and soon, I hope, we shall have a proper field, and play matches like other schools." (Cheers.) "The next thing to be done is to elect officers for the club. Now fire away! Will somebody propose some one?"

For a few moments there was a silence; every one was modestly waiting for another person to mention his own name.

"We must ask Medlar to be president," continued Fraser. "Now, then, who's to be captain?"

After some discussion, the various officers were chosen. It was tacitly agreed that all present must be something, and the various posts were awarded as follows: Fraser was captain, and "Romulus" vice-captain; Bowden and Simpson were propitiated by being made vice-presidents; I was secretary, and Mobsley treasurer; while the other four were to form the committee.

"If there's any money over after we've bought the things," said Fraser, "we must have a proper fixture-card, with all these names put on the front. I think a pink card would look best.—By-the-bye, Mobsley, how much tin have we left?"

The prospect of seeing our names in print was truly delightful, and we all turned eagerly to hear the treasurer's reply.

Mobsley stared at Fraser. "What money?" he asked.

"Why, the money we've made by this tea-meeting, you ass!"

The "ass" continued to stare blankly at the last speaker.

"There's no money," he answered.

"You lunatic, there must be!" shouted Fraser. "We had this tea-meeting on purpose to get it. What's become of the ticket-money?"

"*Why, it went to buy the grub!*" faltered Mobsley.

The visionary bats, stumps, and printed fixture-cards all vanished into thin air. It was some moments before the awful truth dawned upon us; then Simpson suddenly burst out hee-hawing like a demented donkey.

"He! he!" he laughed; "what an awful sell! Well, you are a set of muffs! We shall stand a jolly good chance of getting a cricket club if we go on at this rate."

"I call it a fraud," grumbled Bowden. "Here we've paid the threepence each for a crumb of cake and half

a jam-pot of ditch-water, and done it for the good of the cause ; and the whole thing turns out a swindle."

" Well, how is it ?" cried Fraser distractedly. " We could not have done with less grub. Tea-meetings *do* make money—that's what they're held for—so why hasn't this one ?"

None of the audience had ever run a tea-meeting, and so were unable to answer the question ; even Mobsley, the originator of the scheme, was at a loss to explain how it had so signally failed ; and after a sharp interchange of uncomplimentary remarks between the captain and the vice-presidents, we prepared to return to the house.

Even now the closing scene in connection with this ill-starred adventure still remained to be enacted.

In descending to the stable, Simpson deliberately pushed Mobsley off the manger. The latter came staggering to the ground, and in so doing dropped three plates which he had borrowed from Hannah, and which were immediately smashed to atoms on the stone floor.

" You cad ! you did that on purpose."

The offender responded with a kick. " Don't call me names," he said.

We had grown to regard Mobsley as a worm who never turned, but in this we were mistaken. He

rushed at Simpson, and gave him a right and left on the chest. The latter immediately closed with his smaller opponent, and flung him violently to the ground. But the measure of Simpson's iniquity was full, and this last transgression was all that was needed to bring down vengeance upon him for his past offences.

The next instant he received a sharp slap across the face. This time it was Fraser who operated, and the sounding smack was as music in our ears.

If it had been any one else, Bowden might have interfered; but though the bigger of the two, he had no inclination to try conclusions with Fraser, and so stood looking on with a grin, pretending to regard the matter as a joke.

Simpson rounded on his assailant with a cry of rage, and in doing so unguardedly exposed his other cheek to the smiter, who promptly saluted it with another exhilarating smack. "There!" he said; "perhaps that will teach you better manners."

"What d'you want to set on me for?" blubbered Simpson; "I haven't done anything."

"Yes, you have: you shoved Mobsley off the manger. It was just one of your mean tricks, and we've had enough of them. Look here, you'll have to pay for those plates."

“But I haven’t the money.”

“Yes, you have; so just shell it out.”

Fraser’s attitude was so threatening that Simpson produced half a crown, which the former handed to Mobsley, telling him to pay Hannah and give back the change.

We wandered off to the schoolroom, feeling rather depressed, and with a general consciousness of having failed and “drawn blank” which even the sight of Simpson having his ears boxed had failed to lighten. “Romulus” and “Remus” were like two terriers: the sight of any other folks quarrelling exercised an irresistible influence on them to do likewise, and accordingly they saw fit to revive the dispute over the jam-pot incident.

“You did just the same thing when you jumped down on me and made me upset that kettle.”

“I didn’t! I couldn’t help it; I fell.”

“No, you didn’t; you did it on purpose.”—“Look here, John, I’ll smack your head!”—“No, you won’t; I’ll smack yours.” (A struggle.) “Shut up, Arthur!”—“Leave go, John.”—“I shan’t.”—“Yes, you will.”—“No, I won’t.”—“Yah! there, what did I tell you—”

This discussion was brought to an end by Arthur Jones bumping his own head with considerable violence

against the schoolroom door-post; the sight of which calamity sufficiently revived our drooping spirits to raise a laugh from the spectators.

This little outburst of merriment had scarcely died away when Brewer came hurrying up the room with a piece of paper in his hand. "I say," he exclaimed, "here's a rum thing. I've had an anonymous letter. It must have come by the afternoon post."

"An anonymous letter!" echoed Fraser.

"Well, it's only signed 'S.' It's awful rubbish. You read it."

Fraser took the epistle; it was written in a scrawling hand, on a dirty sheet of notepaper, and ran as follows:—

"DEAR MOP,—K. business has fallen through, so you needn't trouble. Hope to see you soon; watch for advt. in *The Observer*. Yours, S."

"It doesn't say where it comes from."

"No; but the postmark's London."

"Well, don't you know any one in London?"

"I've got an aunt living there, but she's an awfully proper person. I don't think," added Brewer thoughtfully, "she'd write that nonsense, and call me 'Mop.'"

"Well, it's a very good name for you," remarked "Romulus," laughing. "If any one dressed a mop up in a coat and a pair of breeches, and stuck you and it side by side, it would be impossible to tell t'other from which."

Brewer was certainly rather a slovenly boy, with a shock head of hair which was scarcely ever tidy. It was natural, however, that he should resent this uncomplimentary allusion to his personal appearance.

"Shut up, 'Romulus,'" he answered; "your face looks like a pat of bad butter stuck on the end of a bust-up umbrella. I know what it is: one of you chaps has sent it for a lark."

Every one declared he had not done so, and there was evidently so much truth in the denial that we began to grow interested. The matter was no longer a joke; it was really rather curious. Mobsley's eyes opened and his mouth and nose twitched as though he sniffed a genuine mystery.

"How was it addressed?"

The envelope was passed round.

"Mr. C. BREWER,

Carlsham Road,

Stockingham,"

was the inscription.

“Pooh!” murmured Bowden, who liked to throw cold water on everything of which he himself was not the originator—“pooh! it’s nothing; it’s only one of the day boys’ foolery.”

The day boys, however, when questioned on the following morning, to a man denied having sent the letter; and the more we read it, the less sense there seemed to be in its contents.

Brewer got christened “Mop,” and that was the only lasting impression the epistle seemed to have produced on the minds of the majority of his comrades.

Mobsley, however, was not going to give up without a struggle his idea of a mystery.

“I’m sure there’s something in that letter,” he remarked, sitting up in bed after the lights had been put out. “I shouldn’t be surprised if some one came and murdered young Brewer; or he may be a spy of some kind; or perhaps he knows of some hidden treasure. At all events, we ought to watch the advertisements in *The Observer*.”

“Well, Medlar takes it in,” answered Fraser. “You’d better ask Hannah to lend it to you every evening.”

“I will,” said Mobsley. “You see, before long we shall hear something more about that letter.”

And so we did.

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH AND BURIAL OF MOBSLEY'S MICE.

SIMPSON had been “sat on,” but the cricket club still remained a castle in the air—an enthusiast’s dream. Fraser, however, was a long way from owning himself beaten, and early in the following week he once more returned to the charge.

No enterprise can be carried through in this world without money: the tea-meeting had been a dismal failure, and some other means had to be decided on for putting funds into the treasury. What was to be done? Mobsley came forward and suggested what he called a “snow-ball”—a scheme by which every one bound himself to get two other subscribers, who in turn must each promise to do likewise. In this manner, if the conditions were faithfully complied with, there was no reason why the movement should not, in course of time, spread from shore to shore, until benighted blacks, far in heathen lands, would be tapped

on the shoulder and requested to subscribe to the Hanover House Cricket Club.

It was a brilliant idea, but somehow it seemed almost too grand to be feasible; and Fraser abandoned it in favour of a more practical plan of his own invention.

“What we'll do,” he said, “is this: we'll have an auction. Every chap's got something he can sell, and the money that's raised shall be devoted to buying bats and wickets.”

Anything calculated to enliven the monotony and sameness of our play hours was hailed with delight. Nearly all promised to contribute something, the only exceptions being Bowden and Simpson, who were too mean to sacrifice any of their personal property for the public good.

The sale took place on Wednesday afternoon. The result was so extraordinary that the whole thing must be described.

Fraser was the first to offer a sacrifice, and it took the shape of a box of microscope slides.

“I forget exactly what these are,” he said, “but there's all kinds of interesting things, like a flea's hind leg and a bluebottle's whiskers. You can see little specks of something if you hold them up to the light,

and one or two of them have got crackjaw names as long as your arm."

"But don't you want a microscope to look at them through?" queried Wood.

"Well, of course it's better," answered the other shortly; "but what's the use of a microscope if you haven't got any slides to look at? Besides, it's jolly interesting to show them as they are, and be able to point to a little speck of dust and tell people it's a wasp's wisdom tooth or a bee's eyebrow. Now, who'll have them?"

Mobsley, I am sure, did not really want the slides; but, with a gush of public spirit, he bid a shilling, and they were handed over.

"Romulus" and "Remus" now jointly offered a box of paints for our consideration. The twins evidently painted after the manner of most boy artists: they dispensed altogether with a palette, flooding the paints themselves with dirty water, and sucking their brushes between every change of colour; this gave the box rather the appearance of having been left outside during a week's heavy rain.

"I say," murmured Gale, "have you been playing boats with this thing?"

"No, it's all square," answered "Romulus;" "the

paints are all right when you come to use 'em. What's the bidding?"

No one made any offer until Fraser planked down the shilling he had just received from Mobsley for the slides, and so became the possessor of the article.

I came next with an ornamental pen-box, which I prized greatly from the fact that it had a real lock. The key was one of those common little things with one ward—everybody on earth possesses a duplicate; yet the pen-box had been a strong room in which I had stored my few treasures, and I sighed as I handed it over to the Joneses in exchange for a shilling. Gale now produced a book entitled "Uncle John's Talks with the Children," which he had the audacity to describe as "one of the best things ever written." The volume was received with a dead silence which in time grew positively oppressive. Every one seemed to doubt "Uncle John's" powers as a conversationalist, and not a single offer was made. At length I caught Fraser's eye. There was no help for it: I planked down my shilling, and received the book.

Brewer now put up a little silver charm containing a fragment of the Atlantic cable, for which Gale paid a shilling. Wood followed with a blotting-case which

he never used. It had been given him as a birthday present, and he would no more have thought of soiling its clean white pages than he would of blotting a letter on his Sunday collar ; still, he sacrificed it for the good of the cause, and Brewer secured it for a shilling, though it was certainly worth half a crown. This was the last "lot," and we remained for some moments examining our new possessions. Mobsley was vainly endeavouring to make something out of his microscope slides by holding them up to the light, while I was gazing rather ruefully at the picture of a gentleman with faultless side whiskers addressing a group of very angelic-looking children, whose faces one longed to rub over with an inky blackboard duster.

"And now," said Fraser briskly, "let's reckon up what we've made. Hand over the money."

"I haven't anything," said Mobsley ; "that shilling was the last I had."

"Well, who's got it ?"

"I suppose I have," murmured Wood ; "but I don't see why I should stump up unless the others do."

"I hadn't any money to start with," said Brewer, "and the bob I got for my Atlantic cable I paid to Wood for his blotter."

"But what rot !" cried Fraser. "Here we've been

selling things for the benefit of the cricket club, and now you all say you've got no money!"

After a lengthy and heated discussion, the truth of the situation dawned upon us. No one except Mobsley had had a penny to bless himself with, each thinking it sufficient to contribute some article to the sale. Mobsley's shilling had been passed from hand to hand, and we had simply been exchanging possessions. Mobsley had bought some slides, and Wood had sold his blotter; as for the others, Fraser had changed his slides for a box of paints, the Joneses their paints for a pen-box, Gale a book for a watch-chain charm, and Brewer his bit of Atlantic cable for an ornamental blotter, while I had bartered my precious pen-box for that book of sweetly good advice.

When this extraordinary state of affairs became known, there was an outburst of discontent; every one wished to regain his former possessions, and a general exchange might have been effected had not Gale absolutely and doggedly refused to take back "Uncle John." This, of course, made it impossible to carry out the suggestion, and so Mobsley's shilling finally found a resting-place in the pocket of Wood.

The entire blame was laid on Fraser—it was his project, and the fault-finders declared that he must

have seen from the first what was going to happen; even Wood turned against him, and expressed a wish that he would "give over acting." Perhaps the two persons who had suffered most from the transaction were Mobsley and myself—he paying his last shilling for some useless microscope slides, and I having exchanged my pen-box for what no mortal boy could ever read. Nevertheless, we forbore to turn against Fraser. We felt that his motives were sincere; and so, leaving the others to cool down at their leisure, we strolled off towards the stable, and there, strange to say, found ourselves mixed up in a fresh trouble, which for the time being caused us to forget the unfortunate result of the auction.

Things often seem to go by contraries. Mobsley was destined to enter a large pork-butchering business, in view of which Nature had implanted in him a tender love for animal life seldom seen in a boy. Everything that ran, flew, hopped, or crawled was dear to Mobsley. He was not deeply versed in natural history, and knew no long names of classes and sub-kingdoms; but, like the Ancient Mariner, at the sight of "happy living things" he "blest them unaware." It would require a separate chapter to give a list of his various pets, concerning which remarkable stories might be told. That

very term he had been keeping ten caterpillars in a cardboard box in our bedroom. One night, after feeding them, he left the lid off, and in the morning the whole family had disappeared. One was found resting on the edge of the looking-glass after the fatigues of what must have been at least a six-yard journey; but though we hunted high and low, we never discovered any of its nine companions. It was not very pleasant, after the light had been put out, to lie awake expecting wandering caterpillars to come crawling over your face; and so Fraser forbade any repetition of what he called "keeping wild-beast shows in the bedroom."

For the last two terms Mobsley's affections had been lavished upon three white mice, which lived in a soap-box on a high window-sill in the day boys' cloak-room. They were of uncertain gender, and we called them "Reading," "Writing," and "Arithmetic." In spite of rather bad manners—as, for instance, getting bodily into the saucer and walking about in their bread-and-milk—they were lovable little beasts. "Arithmetic" especially was a favourite of ours; he had a funny little piebald patch on his sleek white body, and when put to crawl about on your shoulder, would come poking his pink nose into your neck in the most unconcerned and sociable manner. When we had nothing better to do,

we took them out for an airing ; though ever since the day when "Reading" had given us endless trouble by taking it into his silly little white head to explore the inside of the dining-room piano, we had given them outdoor exercise in the garden.

"Bring out the mice," said Fraser, "and let's make them climb trees."

Mobsley went to fetch his pets. A few moments later we heard a cry of astonishment, and he came rushing out with the box in his hands.

"They're dead!" he cried — "dead, all three of them!"

"What?" exclaimed Fraser.

Mobsley put the box down on the ground, and we knelt down to examine it. It was only too true. In that half of the cage which we called the parlour, "Reading" and "Writing" were lying on their backs, with a pathetic curve in their pink paws ; while poor little "Arithmetic" was discovered just inside the bedroom, as though he had crawled there to die, and expired in the effort.

"Something must have got at them and killed them."

"There are no marks," answered Mobsley huskily — "not a scratch."

"Well, then, some fellow's done it," continued Fraser; "and not long ago, either, for they're still warm."

"I know who it is—it's that beast Simpson; and he did it because of that row we had with him after the tea-meeting."

We all burst out into a passionate storm of abuse and threats. Simpson should be thrashed, kicked, pumped on; his favourite possessions should be destroyed, and the ink-jar upset over the contents of his desk; even I (whose ears had been boxed that very morning by a day boy not nearly Simpson's size) announced my intention of tying him to the play-ground seat and pelting him with rotten oranges.

In the midst of this demonstration, who should appear upon the scene but Simpson himself, walking down the path arm in arm with Bowden.

"Hallo!" said the latter. "What's up? What are you chaps quarrelling about? Little boys shouldn't show naughty tempers."

Fraser was bubbling over with wrath; under such circumstances a tooth for a tooth was his motto, and a big back tooth if possible.

"We aren't quarrelling," he yelped. "And you know very well what's up—at least Simpson does. What have you been doing to Mobsley's mice?"

Bowden and his friend stared at each other in apparent astonishment; then the former calmly stepped forward, and peering into the cage picked up poor "Writing" by the tail.

"Well, I never!" he said: "the little beggars are dead!"

"Of course they are!" spluttered Fraser. "Simpson's killed 'em; I know he has."

Simpson was standing with a paper bag in his hand, munching biscuits.

"What rot!" he answered. "Bowden and I have been out all the afternoon; we walked to Penston and back. There, see for yourself." As he spoke he held out the paper bag, which bore the inscription, "J. Hollis, Baker and Confectioner, Penston."

Here was certainly sufficient evidence to prove the truth of his statement: the two boys could not possibly have walked to Penston and back in less than two hours, and the mice had evidently not been dead a quarter of that time.

"I'll tell you what it is, Fraser," remarked Bowden: "you're getting rather too fond of slanging people without any cause when you've got a grudge against them. If I were Simpey, I'd go and complain to Medlar."

With a parting sneer the speaker turned upon his heel; for once he seemed to have right on his side, and, what with the ridiculous termination to the auction, and this last unfortunate occurrence, coming on the same afternoon, Fraser's star certainly did not seem to be in the ascendant. The evident determination on the part of the Fates not to countenance our cricket club, and this sudden and mysterious end which had come to "Reading," "Writing," and "Arithmetic," weighed heavily upon our hearts. After evening study Fraser and I wandered out in the deepening twilight for a breath of fresh air; the door of the cloak-room was open; we wandered inside, and saw a solitary figure leaning face to the wall underneath the window.

What was the worth of three white mice? you may ask. Well, a great deal at Hanover House, where there was little to take an interest in when lessons were finished.

"Come away," I whispered, plucking at my companion's arm; "he's blubbing."

Fraser, however, went over and took the mourner by the arm.

"Cheer up, Mobsley!" he said. "Look here, I've got a grand idea. Next term, when my brother comes back from sea, I'm going to ask him to bring me a

monkey, and we'll have it between us; one of the real mischievous sort, that you have to keep chained up, and that pull old gentlemen's wigs off, and smash crockery. It'll be a prime lark!"

Fraser had always some bright project in view, the very mention of which was calculated to lighten heavy hearts—some fascinating scheme which, when Hope's anchor was lost, he would send on board like a strong tow-rope wherewith to drag us from a lee shore of dark despair. As a matter of fact, the monkey never came to break Miss Trigg's best china, but the mention of it caused Mobsley to wipe his eyes on the "Defeat of the Spanish Armada" (or rather on a spirited picture of that great sea fight), and forget for the time being the sorrowful fate of his little friends.

On the following day it was decided that "Reading," "Writing," and "Arithmetic" should be awarded a state funeral, which it was agreed should take place soon after four o'clock, when the day boys had departed, as we feared lest they should be guilty of too much levity, and perhaps turn the ceremony into an unseemly romp. The interment was to be made in a corner of the playground, close under the boards, on which an inscription might be cut; and there, for all I

know, it may remain to this very day, carved in jagged, straggling characters—

“R., W., AND A. JUNE 20, 187—.”

“Romulus” and I dug the grave, using the school-room poker for a pick, and an old iron spoon for a shovel. We were grubbing away with these tools when suddenly some one spoke to us, and looking up, we saw Mr. Greenaway’s new man leaning over the boards just above our heads.

“Hallo! what are you a-doing of?” he asked. He had looked over the partition and exchanged a few words with us on several occasions since the afternoon when we first made his acquaintance. We hardly knew whether to like or dislike the fellow, but in this instance he seemed amicably disposed towards us, and we answered his inquiry by describing the doleful ceremony which was about to be performed.

The stranger seemed mightily amused at the project.

“Well, I declare!” he exclaimed, laughing. “If I won’t stay here and see it! When it’s over you ought to fire three volleys in the air, like they do over the sodgers. Never mind; you wait. He! he!”

Though we did not notice it at the time, the speaker’s face was flushed, and there was a faint

odour of spirits perceptible in his immediate neighbourhood. He was not actually intoxicated, but had taken sufficient to render him a trifle flighty in his words and actions.

Ten minutes later the mournful procession formed up in the stable, and moved slowly down the garden path. Gale and Bowden marched first, playing a tremulous solo on a comb and penny whistle, which occasionally bore some slight resemblance to the "Dead March." "Romulus" and "Remus," Fraser and myself came next, supporting the four corners of a towel on which was laid the coffin, an old slate-pencil box. Mobsley followed as chief mourner, and the other three brought up the rear. Mr. Greenaway's man was still looking over the top of the partition, and as the *cortége* entered the playground he began to weep aloud in such a very realistic and at the same time comical manner, that even Mobsley's long face broadened into a grin. The rest of us were convulsed with laughter, while the man buried his face in his hands, giving vent to the most heartrending sobs, and, leaning over, seemed to shed actual tears into the open grave.

In a very indecorous manner we consigned the remains of poor "Reading," "Writing," and "Arithmetic" to their last resting-place.

"That'll do," said Fraser, who was simply exploding at the groans, gurgles, and queer antics of the stranger—"that'll do; now fill in the earth."

"Wait a minute," said a voice above; "we must have a proper finish."

Bang! bang! bang!

Every one nearly jumped out of his skin. "Romulus" grabbed hold of my arm, and Simpson and Wood fell over each other and rolled upon the ground. The air was full of smoke. The man had fired three shots from a revolver just above our heads, and the sharp reports still rang in our ears like the shrill blast of a whistle.

"I say," cried Fraser, "what's that for?"

"That!" answered the other, laughing boisterously; "why, that's the three volleys fired over the grave. Now it's all been done proper."

We calmed down, and turned to finish our task, the stranger still watching us, and chuckling at the success of his unexpected participation in the proceedings.

"I say, Mop," remarked Fraser, "give me that spoon."

"What spoon? And who are you a-calling 'Mop'? Here, what d'you mean?"

It was the man who had spoken, in sharp, angry tones. All the mirth had suddenly died out of his face, and he glared down at us with knitted brows.

"I was only asking Brewer for that old iron spoon," answered Fraser, in astonishment.

"Who's Brewer?"

"That chap there."

"And what makes you call him 'Mop'?"

"Because he had an anonymous letter the other day signed 'S.' and it began 'Dear Mop.'"

"It did!" cried the man, greatly excited. "Why, hang it all! that letter was meant for *me*! My name's Brewer—Charles Brewer."

"And are you called 'Mop'?" asked Mobsley innocently.

"Never you mind!" shouted the other, in a rage; "I want my letter. What business have you got with it? Bring it here this instant, or I'll—I'll come over and fetch it myself."

Awed by this sudden outburst, Brewer ran to his desk, and having brought the letter, handed it up to his strange namesake.

The latter glanced it hurriedly through, then stared at the address.

"Just like those dunderheaded postmen!" he muttered; and cramming the epistle into his pocket, bestowed a parting scowl upon us, and disappeared from view behind the boarding.

CHAPTER V.

MELANCHOLY ENDING TO THE CRICKET CLUB SCHEME.

ON the night of the mice's funeral, Mobsley so far recovered his spirits as to lie awake and tell us a story in which old Greenaway's manservant figured as a pirate captain who had lost his ship, and was lurking in disguise until he could get another.

“What d'you think he wants with that revolver?” asked Wood.

“I don't know. Perhaps it is to keep away robbers,” answered Fraser. “Dick Adams said that the old chap has a lot of things that must be worth a heap of money.”

There was certainly something rather curious about the man Brewer, which afforded us plenty of opportunity for speculation and reflection. Up to the present he had been roughly civil whenever we had chanced to encounter him; but from the time of our handing over the anonymous letter, his conduct and

bearing underwent an entire change. He frowned at us when we passed him in the street, and muttered some scarcely audible remark that we all wanted "hiding." In one place, as has already been mentioned, we had scooped a small hole under the boarding, through which I was accustomed to crawl when anything was thrown by accident into the next garden. Brewer blocked this up with earth and rubbish, and threatened that Mr. Greenaway would "have the law on us" if ever we were caught trespassing on his premises.

"He was a bit screwed the other afternoon," said "Romulus," "and I shouldn't wonder if old Greenaway heard him let off that revolver, and so found it out, and dropped on him. That's why he is in such a wax."

"Well, I believe it's because of that letter," answered Mobsley. "He's in a rage with us for having read it; that's what I think."

Whatever his reason may have been, Brewer the man had certainly assumed a decidedly unfriendly attitude towards us; and we, for our part, were not slow to accept the situation, and to retaliate with a similar show of ill-feeling.

Fraser had for the time being lost some of his usual popularity. The auction fiasco was laid at his door.

Those who were not content with the result of the general exchange of property openly pronounced the thing a swindle, of which he had been the promoter; and even I, his most loyal and obedient admirer, could not help feeling rather sore at having bartered my pen-box for the book of wearisome homilies. In addition to this, Bowden had been secretly stirring up strife over what he called the "high and mighty" way in which Fraser had accused Simpson of killing Mobsley's mice.

"If he imagines he's going to lord it over us," said Bowden, "he'll find he's mistaken. At present he seems to think he can say what he likes, and that we're to do just as he pleases!"

Taking all things into consideration, the cricket club scheme seemed like to die a natural death. Fraser, however, was a regular old "die-hard;" he made one more desperate attempt to carry out his project, and the manner in which this came about was as follows.

On Saturday morning Fraser received a registered letter. He sat very quiet at breakfast-time, evidently turning over something in his mind; and as soon as the meal was over, before the day boys arrived, he mounted the iron seat in the playground, and shouted to us to come and hear what he had to say.

“It’s my birthday,” he began, “and my uncle who came back from abroad last year has sent me half a sovereign.”

Half a sovereign! at Hanover House it was riches. We stared at Fraser, and almost wondered whether he meant to take a house and get married right away!

“Now I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he went on. “It’s pocket-money day, and if you fellows’ll subscribe as much as you can towards the cricket club, I’ll give my ten shillings, and we’ll get some things, and start playing.”

In spite of the prejudice existing for the moment in the public mind, this offer was at once recognized as the outcome of a generous spirit, and was received with a shout of applause.

Bowden and Simpson hummed and hawed, but the remainder promised to do as Fraser suggested, and gave him three cheers into the bargain.

This seemed a promising beginning; but the evil spirit which from the very commencement seemed to have been dogging our steps in the matter of this cricket club scheme was not asleep, and once more ill-luck and misfortunes overtook us.

Mr. Medlar usually gave out pocket-money soon after morning school, and it was agreed that we should get

the things at once, and play that same afternoon. On this occasion, however, the cash-box was not produced at the usual time—the head-master explained that he had no change—and it was not until late in the afternoon that we drew our slender allowances.

Four shillings was the amount handed over to the games fund, Bowden and Simpson having contributed threepence between them.

Fraser was not a person to let grass grow under his feet. He at once started off to buy the things, and called on me to accompany him, and assist in bringing them back.

We had not gone more than a hundred yards when our attention was attracted by the figure of a man walking slowly down the road in front of us. He was wandering along in an aimless sort of way, with his hands in his pockets, and his head sunk forward on his breast.

“Hallo!” said Fraser. “Why, it’s Dick Adams!”

We quickened our pace. It does not take silver or gold to win a boy’s affections. Dick never had anything better to give away than horse-chestnuts, or a catapult stick, or some windfall apples, and it was certainly not the loss of these that had caused us to sorrow over the fact that we should no longer have

him for a neighbour. I ran on and caught his arm.
“Dick !”

It seemed to take him a moment to awaken from his reverie.

“ Why, it’s you, Master Dean !” he answered. “ How are you, sir ?—And Master Fraser, too !”

Our meetings with Dick Adams had hitherto been made the occasion for some rather boisterous conversation and a sort of general merry-making. This time, however, there was something in his face and appearance that checked our flow of spirits, and the accustomed jokes died on our lips.

“ Well, Dick, how are you ?”

“ Oh, middling, thank you, sir,” he answered, and then was silent.

“ We’re awfully sorry you’ve left old Greenaway,” said Fraser awkwardly.

“ I’ve just come away from there now. The feller who’s got my job said the master wouldn’t see me ; but I don’t believe he took in the message. He never gave Mr. Greenaway my name at all, that’s my opinion.”

“ Shouldn’t wonder,” remarked Fraser. “ He’s a beast.”

“ What are you doing now, Dick ?” I asked.

He looked down at me with a curious, half-startled

expression, such as fellows often had on their faces when Mr. Medlar suddenly dropped upon them with a stiff question in mental arithmetic.

“ Doing ? ” he answered ; “ why, nothing—an odd job here or there, but I can’t get no reg’lar work. I haven’t earned a penny since las’ Monday. That feller up at Mr. Greenaway’s says why didn’t I put by for a rainy day ? I wasn’t going to tell him what had become of my money.”

The balance of Dick’s wages had gone to support his old mother. We knew that well enough, for we had seen him procuring postal orders, and had enjoyed the fun of bobbing his arm when he addressed the envelope with one of the vile corroded pens which are so often provided for public use on a post-office counter.

“ Where are you living now ? ” asked Fraser.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

“ Anywhere and nowhere,” he answered.

I was only a youngster, little more than a child ; yet sometimes even children are quick to guess the truth, and the tone of his voice struck a chill to my heart. It may seem a silly question, but I was serious enough when I made the inquiry,—

“ Dick, w—what did you have for dinner to-day ? ”

He laughed again in the same harsh manner.

"Let's see," he answered. "Roast duck and green peas, and sparrer-grass, and jam tart, and Gorgunzoler cheese."

I suppose he expected us to laugh at his sally, but I think we were both of us more inclined to cry. We had often read of people struggling to earn a living, and tramping the streets hopeless and hungry, but it had never been brought home to us before as a bitter and stern reality; now it seemed to strike us dumb, and our companion, mistaking the meaning of our silence, muttered some excuse, and turned off down a by-street.

I would have given worlds to help Dick Adams, but the thing seemed impossible. Fraser, however, was of a more practical turn of mind.

"Look here," he exclaimed, suddenly stopping short and turning on his heel, "he can't green me like that. I'll bet you he's had no grub to-day; he looks half starved. It's awful. We must do something."

I nodded and stared blankly at the pavement. How it was to be done I could not imagine.

"I say," continued my companion, "there's this fourteen bob we've got for the cricket club. I don't see why I should give ten shillings if the other fellows only subscribed four. I'll give five of mine to Dick

Adams, and we shall still have enough left to get all the things we want for making a start."

He dashed off at once round the neighbouring corner, and in a few moments came back with a flushed face.

"He wouldn't take it at first; but I said, 'Just look at that lamp-post!' and when he turned his head I stuffed the money in his waistcoat pocket, and bolted."

We bought our cricketing outfit—a hard indiarubber ball, a solid block of wood shaped like a bat, and some plain deal stumps. It was only sufficient material for a game of single wicket, but Fraser remarked that until we got our field this was all we should require; and we returned home fondly imagining that we had performed our mission in a very satisfactory manner. On our arrival, however, Bowden and Simpson, who were always ready to stir up strife, began immediately to find fault with our purchases.

"Pooh!" remarked the former; "what rotten stumps! Why didn't you get ones with brass tops?"

"Well, I never!" added the latter, banging the bat against the stable door. "What d'you call this? It's got no more spring in it than a broomstick! What d'you want to go and buy an Indian club for? I thought we were going to play cricket!"

Fraser remarked that it was all you could expect for nine shillings, and went on to tell of our gift to Dick Adams. This caused further trouble. Bowden and Simpson declared that Fraser had no right to give away money that he had already subscribed to a public fund ; while the latter argued that as he had still defrayed more than half the cost of the cricket things, he was perfectly justified in having given away a part of his birthday present. The dispute was carried on with unnecessary bitterness. Other boys became infected with the spirit of contention. Gale called Mobsley a performing donkey ; Brewer promised to smack my head ; while "Romulus" and "Remus" were heard repeating, "Shut up, John !" "Shut up, Arthur!" as though the phrases were recurring decimals. This general altercation lasted until tea-time, and even then the feeling of discontent did not altogether subside ; and during the whole of Sunday the air seemed heavily charged with electricity, which might at any moment be the cause of another storm.

It was not until the day boys had left on Monday afternoon that we had a chance of testing our purchases ; and then, I must confess, the game was not the success we had expected. In hammering the wicket into the gravel Fraser smashed one of the stumps, and it had to

be bound up with string. The bat stung like a scorpion. The solid indiarubber ball was a fearful missile which mangled any one it hit, like a double-headed shot; and when Bowden tried swift overhand, neither *slip* nor *square leg* was safe, for no one could say where the ball would pitch, while *point*, so to speak, carried his life in his hands, and stood equal chance of being "laid out" by batsman or bowler.

Once more it devolved on Fraser to make the scoring for his side. When the indiarubber ball whizzed past his head, he took as little notice of it as though it had been a bluebottle, and sent it bounding about the play-ground, cannoning from side to side as if the wall and boards had been the cushions of a billiard-table. At length, with a vigorous drive, he lifted it clean over the partition into old Greenaway's garden.

"Romulus" was hoisted up on Gale's shoulder.

"It's all right," he said; "the man's there.—Hi, Mr. Brewer, d'you mind chucking that ball over?"

The man responded with a growl.

"Look here," he said, "I can't afford to waste my time for you; and what's more, I ain't a-going to have you chucking things over here, knocking my vegetables about. Well, I'll let you have it back this once; but if it comes over again, it'll stay."

“Surly beast!” muttered “Romulus.” “Dick Adams would have sent it back at once.”

Five minutes later the ball went over again.

“It’s no use asking that fellow to throw it back,” remarked Gale. “Besides,” he added, peering through a knot-hole, “the beggar’s not there; he’s gone into the house.”

“Well, the chap who knocked it over ought to fetch it,” grumbled Bowden, who was not very well pleased at having his bowling punished in this fashion.

“All right; I’ll go,” answered Fraser. “Some one give me a leg up.”

He threw down the bat, and, assisted by “Romulus,” scaled the partition. There were cross-pieces on the other side which rendered the return journey an easy matter. Unfortunately, just as he was dropping back into the playground, Brewer once more appeared upon the scene.

“All right!” he shouted; “I saw you. Just you do it again, and I’ll put the master on your track.”

War had practically been declared now, and we sent up a jeer of defiance.

“Bring out your pistol,” cried Fraser, “and set it as a spring-gun.”

I had my eye against a crack in the boards, and saw

an unusually fierce look flash across the man's face. He had a coal-hammer in his hand, and without a word came leaping across the beds as though he would have done Fraser some injury. The latter hastily dropped down on our side of the partition. The man looked over, muttering threats, which we answered with chaff and grimaces, and eventually he returned to his work, and we to our game.

The match, however, could not be finished, for a short time later it was interrupted by the first tea-bell.

"One ball more," cried Fraser, "and that shall be the last."

The words were prophetic: the last it was in more senses than one. Fraser slogged; once more the ball cleared the boundary. For a moment we stood spell-bound, and then the stillness was broken by an appalling crash of glass.

"Whew!" cried "Romulus." "It's smashed the old chap's cucumber frame!"

This disaster caused us to be seized with a sudden panic, as though we expected that the man Brewer would climb the partition and open fire on us with his revolver. Seizing our bat and stumps, we fled from the playground, treading on the heels of those in front of us, elbowing each other out of the pathway, and

causing Wood and Mobsley to fall headlong over the handles of a wheelbarrow. Of all the runs made that afternoon, this final stampede back to the house was the one performed with the greatest amount of spirit and dash.

“There’ll be a row over this,” said Mobsley, hugging his bruised shin.

We had not long to wait. Mr. Soper was exerting his weak voice, pleading, threatening, coaxing, and commanding us in the usual manner to give over dropping books and banging desk lids, and settle down to our evening preparations, when Mr. Medlar himself entered the schoolroom.

“Attend to me!” he said sharply. “I have just received from Mr. Greenaway a serious complaint regarding your conduct this afternoon. The servant-man has informed him that my boys have intruded into his garden, trampled down the flowers and vegetables, and broken nearly all the glass in his cucumber frame.”

“What a lie!” whispered Mobsley; “it couldn’t have smashed more than a couple of panes.”

“This is a most serious matter. I am astonished that any of my pupils should have been guilty of such an outrage. Let the boy who is responsible for it stand up.”

Fraser obeyed the order. He would readily have borne all the blame if we had let him ; but his comrades were English boys, though they may have only played cricket with a solid bat in a gravel yard, and with one accord they likewise rose to their feet. Simpson hesitated, but yielded to the general impulse.

Mr. Medlar raised his eyebrows, and stared at us for a moment in silence.

“What’s the meaning of this ?” he inquired.

“Please, sir,” answered Fraser, “I was playing cricket, and I went over the boards to fetch the ball, but I didn’t tread on any flowers or vegetables ; and then I hit the ball on to the cucumber frame, but I don’t think it could have broken more than one, or perhaps two, of the panes of glass.”

“Please, sir,” added “Romulus,” “Fraser wasn’t playing cricket by himself ; we were all of us in the game.”

“Humph ! Mr. Greenaway’s man says it will cost ten shillings to repair the frame,” resumed the headmaster. “I shall therefore stop an equal amount out of every boy’s pocket-money until that sum has been defrayed.—Fraser, you will write five hundred lines for breaking bounds. On no consideration is any boy to enter Mr. Greenaway’s garden. In addition to this,

understand that there are to be no more games of cricket in the playground. You are to confine yourselves to sports which cause no annoyance to your neighbours or damage to their property. Don't let me have to speak of this again."

"Well, I like that!" whispered Simpson, after the head-master had retired. "Here's ten shillings for that broken frame, and four shillings we subscribed for the things—that's fourteen gone down the drain, and all your fault, Fraser. I should think now you'd give up plaguing us with your beastly cricket club."

This last disaster had, as "Romulus" expressed it, fairly knocked the bottom out of the cricket club scheme. Our hopes were blighted. But though we had quaffed freely of the cup of misfortune, it had not yet been drained to the dregs, as will be proved by events narrated in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW WE CELEBRATED THE JONESES' BIRTHDAY.

FRASER was in the dumps. He had set his heart on our having a cricket club, and had done his best and struggled hard to carry out the project; and now the whole thing had ended in a disaster which left no hope of future success. He maintained a gloomy silence in the bedroom, and when I offered to help him with his lines, he ordered me to "go to Jericho."

With Fraser in a state of depression, the whole place, as far as the boarders were concerned, became dull and stagnant. There was no one to start games of French and English in the playground, or at four o'clock to throw the hats of kept-in day boys into the hay-loft.

Only one thing occurred to lighten the gloom of these dreary days. On Tuesday Mobsley came to me with a copy of the previous day's *Observer*.

"There," he said; "read that!"

His thumb-nail was pressed against what is known as the "Agony Column," and under the heading PERSONAL I read the following advertisement:—

"MOP,—Meet me to-morrow usual time.—S."

"There!" said Mobsley; "I thought if we watched we should see something."

We saw something besides the advertisement, for about half-past four that afternoon we caught sight of the man Brewer walking off down the road, clad in his Sunday suit.

"I wonder who 'S.' is!" remarked my companion.

The question afforded an interesting subject for speculation during the remainder of the day, and Mobsley returned to it at bedtime, and lay awake telling me a story which was to introduce the unknown, and ran somewhat as follows:—

"The man Brewer had left Stockingham far behind him, and turning aside from the main road, had entered the precincts of a gloomy wood (all woods were gloomy in Mobsley's stories), and after forcing his way through a thick mass of bushes and brambles, came upon a little clearing, in the centre of which stood a small hut.

"'Hold!' suddenly cried a stern voice. 'Who art thou who, all unasked, venturest to cross the path of S., the hermit warrior of the woods?'"

"It's me," interrupted Fraser, regardless of grammar. "Just you shut up now and let a fellow get to sleep."

"But let us just hear the finish," I pleaded.

"Shan't!" was the reply. "I know what S.'ll be like. He'll be a man of noble appearance, and be curing scalps to make a fringe for his antimacassars."

Fraser was still out of temper, and it was no use attempting to argue with him. I did not even think it worth while to suggest that he meant moccasins, and not antimacassars.

The story came to an untimely end, and Mobsley's conception of the mysterious S. remained untold.

For a week this unsatisfactory state of things continued, but on Friday evening the heavy, stagnant atmosphere of the place seemed to grow lighter.

"To-morrow's my birthday," remarked "Romulus."

"It's mine," added "Remus."

For reasons known only to themselves, the Joneses immediately crossed swords.

"I didn't say it wasn't yours; I said it's mine."

"And it's mine too."—"Of course it is, you block-head! What do you want to contradict for?"—"I'm not contradicting. Pooh! see what a rage he's in!"—"Shut up, you young idiot!"—"I'm not any younger than you are."—"Well, shut up!"—"Well, you shut

up!"—"I'll smack your head, John."—"And I'll smack yours, Arthur."—"You couldn't."—"Yes, I could."—"Yah!"—"Boo!"—"Yah!" And here the contending parties joined battle.

After the combatants had kicked over a paper basket, spilt a lot of ink bumping against the desk, and rubbed the greater portion of an important set of questions off the blackboard by dusting it in turn with each other's heads and shoulders, we fell upon them in a body, and forced them to desist from their struggles.

This intervention of the powers was followed by a moment's silence, which was broken by Fraser exclaiming,—

"I say, fancy a double-barrelled birthday! We ought to do something to celebrate it."

There was a ring in his voice which betokened a return to his former self. We were infected by it. The birthday of twins was certainly something rather out of the common, and every one seemed of the opinion that it should be observed in a suitable manner.

"What shall we do?" was the question.

"Fireworks!" suggested Gale.

"We can't; Medlar won't allow them except on the Fifth of November."

"Oh no; bother fireworks!" said Bowden. "Let's have a good old feed."

"How could we get the grub? no one's got any cash."

The great power of money had never been so deeply impressed on us before. How were we to keep up an important celebration of this kind when the whole company could not raise a sixpence between them? We had, however, determined to make a red-letter day of the occasion—a day not soon to be forgotten; and this we certainly succeeded in doing, though the manner in which the anniversary was impressed upon our minds was startling and unexpected.

By nine o'clock the following morning we were still without a plan, but during morning school Fraser was inspired with an idea, which he expounded to us in the stable as soon as the day boys had gone home.

"Look here!" he said: "we'll have a party."

"A party! What d'you mean? Who's going to give it?"

"Why, 'Romulus' and 'Remus'; they must invite us in honour of their birthday. And we'll play games, and have music, and all that sort of thing."

"But where?"

"Oh, in the playground. We can imagine that's their house. It'll be rare fun."

We had the afternoon before us; there was nothing else to do, and so we agreed to carry out Fraser's proposition. The preliminary arrangements were soon made. The twins were to go into the playground first, in order to be ready to receive us, and the remainder of the company were to come provided with some musical instrument.

"Take your fiddle, 'Remus,'" said Fraser; "and the rest of you, if you can't manage anything else, bring combs and tissue paper."

John Jones learned the violin. He had one piece—"The Bluebells of Scotland," with variations. It began with the air, and the succeeding variations grew faster and faster until they ended with one in demi-semiquavers. When "Remus" practised, he played the air over fifty times, and studiously avoided the variations.

The remainder of us were not very musical. I possessed a policeman's whistle, while Fraser had recently exchanged, with one of the day boys, a compass and a railway key for a small bicycle bugle. It was rather an uncertain sort of instrument. You puffed and blew for seconds with no result, and then,

in a most sudden and unexpected manner, it would emit a bloodcurdling shriek or groan which set all your teeth on edge. The others were forced to provide themselves with instruments manufactured on the spur of the moment.

“They must be ready by this time,” said Fraser.—“Come on, you fellows.”

“I suppose there’s no need to put on clean collars?” remarked Bowden, grinning. “I wish there was going to be some grub. What’s the good of going to a party unless there’s going to be a feed?”

We sauntered in a body down the pathway. Our hosts appeared to have had some little disagreement, for as we neared the entrance into the playground we heard,—

“Shut up, Arthur.”—“Shan’t!”—“Yes, you will.”—“No, I won’t.”—“I’ll bang your head, Arthur.”—“You’d better try.”

There being no servant to show us in, we introduced ourselves, and so interrupted the altercation, which we afterwards discovered had arisen from “Romulus” poking a live lobworm into the interior of his brother’s violin.

I had never before seen Fraser disguised in his company manners. They were certainly very amusing,

and for the first five minutes kept us in fits of laughter. He shook hands with "Romulus" and "Remus," talked about the weather, glanced round the green boarding, and said how much he admired these old panelled rooms, and wound up by asking whether we couldn't have a little music. "Remus" was to lead the band. He tuned his fiddle, propped the "Bluebells of Scotland" up against the back of the iron seat, and the other musicians gathered round to commence operations. Gale produced from his pocket a small toy pistol and a box of paper caps.

"That's not a musical instrument," said Mobsley.

"Never mind," answered Gale; "it'll make a noise."

I have heard the "Bluebells of Scotland" played under all sorts of conditions, from a brass band to a barrel organ, but I have never known anything to equal the rendering with which we celebrated the Joneses' birthday. The combs wailed out a pretty accurate accompaniment to the tune; but Fraser's bugle was not to be trusted, and at most inopportune moments burst in with a weird moan or senseless screech; in all the soft parts Gale exploded paper caps; my introductions on the policeman's whistle were, I fear, not altogether happy; while Mobsley, who was incapacitated by a swollen face from playing a "wind

instrument," beat monotonously with a tack-hammer on the bottom of an old tin can, as though he were some tinker on time work, and in no particular hurry to finish his job. At about the eighth or ninth repeat the orchestra began to warm up to its work, and the performance was in full blast, when the head of Mr. Greenaway's man appeared above the partition.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "What's all this row about?"

We had not forgotten that preposterous charge for the broken cucumber frame, and were quite ready for a quarrel.

"It's nothing to you," answered Fraser. "Haven't you ever heard a band before?"

"A band!" answered the other. "I thought it was a pig-hunt."

"Well, you come over," retorted "Romulus," "and then we'll have one."

At this splendid sally we all laughed.

"Get down and mind your own business," cried Gale. "Go and sneak to old Medlar."

"Stop your noise!" shouted the man.

By way of answer every one seized his instrument, and began an independent performance on the same. The combs wailed, the violin groaned, the bugle went raving mad, my whistle and Gale's pistol rose equally

to the occasion, whilst Mobsley hammered at his tin can as though some question of life or death depended on his knocking in the bottom. In the midst of this uproar the obnoxious Brewer shook his fist at us, and then disappeared; but the music was continued for some time—in fact, until we were forced to give it up for want of breath.

We had certainly scored in this encounter, and every one was delighted at the discomfiture of the enemy. Fraser had by this time quite recovered his customary flow of spirits, and was, as usual, master of the ceremonies, in spite of the fact that "Romulus" and "Remus" were supposed to be the givers of the entertainment.

"Come on," he said. "Now we'll have a game. Let's play 'brigands.'"

"Brigands" was a game of Fraser's own invention; no one, I believe, ever really understood the rules. It was something between "prisoner's base" and a free fight, and seemed to have been devised for the sole purpose of providing every boy with an excuse for tearing the clothes off his neighbour's back.

We played for about ten minutes, at the end of which time Wood was weeping in one corner and the twins struggling in another. Then, thinking it well to change

the form of amusement, some one suggested “blind man’s buff.”

It was certainly a novel idea, and we immediately determined to give it a trial. “Romulus” was the first to have his eyes bandaged; but after the wild excitement of “brigands,” this milder form of sport fell rather flat, and to make matters more lively we decided to have two “blind men” at work instead of one. It so happened that Bowden and Simpson were caught at the same time, and no sooner had the handkerchiefs been knotted securely at the back of their heads than a great thought struck Fraser, which he hurriedly proceeded to impart in whispers to the remainder of the company. One by one, with as little noise as possible, we scrambled up and perched ourselves on the top of the partition which divided us from old Greenaway’s garden. The two unpopular blind men, not knowing what had happened, continued to run round the playground, spreading out their arms, and clasping them on thin air, and making cunning pauses and desperate rushes, all of which were irresistibly comic to the spectators, who indulged in fits of silent laughter.

“I say,” whispered Mobsley, “this old fence is jolly rickety; seems to me the bottom of the boards must be rotten. D’you think it’s safe?”

"Oh yes," muttered Fraser: "it always gives when you run against it."

"I know what you're doing," said Bowden: "you're all lying down in a corner." And he forthwith commenced to crawl about on his hands and knees. The onlookers, perched like a row of birds on a telegraph wire, were convulsed with inward merriment, and the boarding shook so much that several of us nearly lost our balance.

Then the entertainment reached its climax. Close to the wall were the posts of a swing. Bowden and Simpson approached them from opposite sides, and hearing each other's footsteps, began to dodge round the two uprights, each mistaking the other for a fugitive. For some moments they hovered and hesitated, moving cautiously round the swing; then suddenly they rushed into each other's arms, bringing their heads together with a bump which must have made them see more stars than are to be found in a sixpenny rocket.

The spectators could no longer contain themselves. They burst out into peals of laughter, and rocked themselves backwards and forwards in their intense enjoyment of the joke. Then a catastrophe overtook us, terrible almost as the fate which befell those who had watched and mocked the blinded Samson. There was

a cracking, rending noise. The laughter ceased. Every one clutched wildly at the boards. Slowly they went over. For three terrible seconds, which seemed minutes, we hung on the balance; then there was an awful smash. The whole firmament seemed to spin round. The earth was above my head, and the sky beneath my feet; and then, with a prodigious crash, I landed on my back in the middle of a row of pea-sticks. The effect of the disaster was too dreadful to contemplate. Mobsley had been right. The partition was rotten; the greater part of it, like the masts of a wrecked ship, had "gone by the board." The products of that portion of Mr. Greenaway's vegetable garden which lay on the other side were either crushed flat under the boards, or had suffered an almost equal amount of damage from the falling bodies of eight young gentlemen. "Romulus" and "Remus" lay locked in each other's arms in the middle of an asparagus bed; Fraser, Mobsley, and I had demolished the pea-sticks; Gale was sitting on a gooseberry-bush; and the remainder of the party were disporting themselves among the cabbages.

It was a terrible spectacle, and even Bowden and Simpson, who tore the bandages from their eyes, stood horror-struck at the sight which met their astonished gaze.

We struggled to our feet, stumbled across the boards, and regained the playground. Fortunately no one was hurt; but at that moment we had no thought for broken bones.

"Good gracious!" cried Bowden. "What have you fellows been doing?"

"It's all your fault, Fraser," whimpered Wood. "It was you suggested it."

"Can't we stick them up again?" gasped Mobsley. "Old Greenaway and his man will be ready to hang us all when they know what's happened."

It was useless to attempt to repair the damage. The deed was done, and we had to face the consequences.

The tea-bell began to ring, and we trooped up the garden path, brushing the dust from our clothes as we went.

"Perhaps," said Fraser desperately, "they may think it was blown down by the wind."

"Perhaps they will," murmured Mobsley grimly.

There had hardly been a breath of air for a fortnight.

CHAPTER VII.

THE “MOHICANS.”

WE ate our tea in fear and trembling. Mr. Medlar seemed in an exceptionally amiable frame of mind: he smiled round upon us, and, contrary to his usual habit, made some humorous remarks on the subject of the Joneses' birthday. These only served to cast a deeper gloom over our spirits; we tried to laugh, but felt more inclined to weep. How soon would our feigned mirth be turned into mourning, and what would old Mark say when he discovered what had happened to the playground boards?

The meal seemed to last for hours; and at length, when we were dismissed from the table, an excited group gathered in the yard behind the schoolroom to discuss the situation. We had had time to think the matter over, and every one had something to say and suggestions to make.

“All you fellows are to blame,” said Bowden:

"Simpey and I, you know, had nothing to do with it."

"Perhaps, after all, they may think it blew down," remarked Fraser, in a hopeless manner.

"Rubbish!" answered "Romulus." "Hadn't we better go and tell Medlar now at once, and say it was an accident, and ask him to let us off?"

"He won't do that," answered Simpson. "You'd better make out you were just leaning up against it, and you heard a crack, and the whole thing went over."

"Let's get a carpenter to come and put it up in the night, and write home for the money," said Gale.

"Let's all run away," wildly suggested Wood.

We had no time to consider this last proposal, for at that moment the bell rang for evening preparation. Mr. Soper had gone out, and the head-master himself sat at his desk in the schoolroom. We opened our Latin grammars, and sat staring at them in a deathlike silence, broken only by the scratching of Mr. Medlar's pen. A dozen times I read the first sentence, and then had no more idea of the meaning than if it had been written in Chinese.

Suddenly we were startled by a sharp double knock on the door which faced the road. All of us looked up from our books; but before it was possible even to say

"Come in," old Greenaway burst into the room, followed by his man.

What passed in our minds I leave the reader to imagine. Old Mark seemed rather astonished at the intrusion, and must, I think, have cherished some vague notion that his neighbour had called on business—perhaps with the idea of making arrangements for the man Brewer to attend Hanover House as a day boy. At all events, our "head" rose from his chair with a grave smile on his face, and advanced, rubbing his hands together in his usual manner when parents visited the establishment.

"Ah—Mr. Greenaway—you wish to see me, I believe. This is an unexpected pleasure."

"It's not!" suddenly interrupted the visitor, in a shrill, childish voice. "It's exactly the opposite: it's most abominable and outrageous, and I've come to demand an immediate explanation."

"My dear sir—"

"Hold your tongue!" screamed old Greenaway, in a paroxysm of rage. "I'm not your 'dear sir.' When first you proposed to start this—this wild-beast show in what had been a quiet and peaceful neighbourhood, I expostulated with you, and informed you that such a thing could not be tolerated. You would not listen to

my request, and now our habitations are to be made desolate, and our lives unbearable, by this—this band of juvenile marauders!"

During the five years that I spent at Hanover House many sensational events happened in that schoolroom. I saw the blackboard fall on Mr. Soper's head; I was there when T. B. Harris turned loose a stray cat which he had brought in in his book-satchel; and I was sitting on one of the back benches when the elder Griffin, after having been kept in for an hour and a half one November afternoon, suddenly threw two squibs and a cracker into the fire, and bolted off home with the under-master in pursuit. These and other stirring recollections come to my mind as it turns back to the old schoolroom, but I can safely say that I remember nothing which created such a profound sensation as the occurrence which I am now describing. The idea of Mr. Medlar being ordered, in our hearing, to hold his tongue, and Hanover House being described as a wild-beast show! We looked for the sky to fall, yet, by some happy chance, it remained aloft.

But after nearly forty years' daily experience of facing and governing his "band of juvenile marauders," old Mark was not going to be "bounced" by one petulant old gentleman in his second childhood.

"Sir," he answered sternly, "I am at a loss to understand your language. Permit me to observe that on my premises I will not allow the use of such expressions. If you have any just complaint to make against my pupils, I shall be perfectly willing to consider it, provided it be made in a proper and seemly manner. Now, sir, what do you wish to say?"

Mr. Greenaway was not accustomed to be answered back; he spluttered and stammered until Brewer came to his rescue.

"It's like this 'ere—" he began boldly.

"Pardon me," interrupted the master, assuming his most tremendous manner, "I am not aware that I addressed any remark to *you*, sir. At present I am discussing this matter with your master."

In spite of the terrible nature of the interview and the dreadful disclosure which was about to be made, we chuckled with glee. Mr. Medlar was one too many for the enemy; he might punish us later on, but that did not matter so long as he squashed Brewer.

Old Greenaway once more found his tongue.

"I want to know," he cried, in somewhat quieter tones, "what right these boys have to lay waste my garden. This morning I had a capital crop of fruit and vegetables, and now the whole place has been

devastated. I tell you, sir, it is now nothing better than a desert—a howling wilderness—and I insist on receiving an explanation."

"Sir," answered Mr. Medlar, "you astonish me. This shall be inquired into; in fact, with your permission, I will at once come and see the damage of which you complain."

The two gentlemen left the room together, Brewer bringing up the rear with rather a hang-dog look on his face; and the sight of his evident discomfiture gave us a moment's satisfaction as we saw our worst fears realized. Mr. Medlar was absent for nearly a quarter of an hour—we almost wished he would never return; but at length, after what seemed ages of suspense, the door opened, and the blow fell.

"What is the meaning of this? I go down into the playground, and find a large portion of the boarding torn down and flung into the next garden, and a considerable quantity of Mr. Greenaway's vegetables trampled down and destroyed. No wonder, in the face of this incomprehensible outrage and violence, he should speak of this establishment as an assemblage of wild beasts. Answer me this moment, which of you are responsible for this offence? What have you been doing?"

There was a silence; then Fraser faltered out a reply,—

"Please, sir, we were playing blind man's buff."

There was something so absolutely absurd in the idea of connecting this innocent drawing-room amusement with the violent destruction of property, that we could scarcely keep from laughing. Simpson, indeed, gave vent to his feelings by an audible giggle.

That sealed our fate!

There is no need for me to furnish painful details of what followed. Long after the supper bell had rung, old Mark was still pouring out the vials of his wrath upon our devoted heads. Impositions were heaped upon us; pocket-money was stopped; and, until the end of the term, we were not to indulge in any games in the playground unless Mr. Soper was there to superintend our amusements.

"Please, sir," said Bowden, as the head-master at length ceased speaking—"please, sir, Simpson and I didn't do it; it wasn't our fault."

"You took part in the game, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir; but we were the two blind men."

"The chief offenders!" cried Mr. Medlar. "You two will each learn twenty lines more than the others."

"But—"

"Don't answer me, sir. Pass on to supper."

"Hooray!" muttered Fraser. "That just serves Bowden jolly well right. I thought old Mark would soon settle his hash!"

Whatever this mysterious operation may have been, the "hash" had not been so completely settled as Fraser imagined; and half an hour later, when we retired to bed, there were strife and rumours of war on the top landing. By mutual consent, we gathered in the passage to discuss the situation, and Bowden and Simpson seized that opportunity to air their wrongs.

"I never heard of such a thing before," cried the former. "Simpey and I did nothing, and we've got dropped on more than any one else, and all because of you fellows playing us that stupid trick. It's beastly unfair—that's what I call it."

"Well, we couldn't help it," murmured "Romulus" uneasily. "I didn't know the thing was going down, or I shouldn't have got up there."

"It's Fraser's fault," said Simpson. "And if he'd owned up in a decent manner, we should have all been let off."

"That's false!" answered Fraser. "Shut up."

"I won't shut up," continued the other. "I'm going to speak my mind. All along you've done nothing but

get us into rows. It was you made us play cricket up here that night; it was you set old Greenaway's back up the other afternoon by climbing over into his garden and knocking a ball into the cucumber-frame; and it was you who got the other fellows to climb up and sit on the boards. The least thing you could have done would have been to tell Medlar it was your fault and not ours."

"It wasn't!" cried Fraser wrathfully. "I'll punch your head."

"No, you won't," interposed Bowden. "That's what you always say when you haven't any better answer. What Simpey says is quite true; and what's more, you've wasted all our pocket-money, and got all our liberty taken away from us.—I vote," concluded the speaker, turning to the bystanders, "that we send him to Coventry."

There was a gloomy silence; every one was sore and out of temper, and only too ready to lay the blame for what had happened on anybody but themselves. Mobsley's tooth was beginning to ache again, and he spoke indistinctly, with his hand half covering his mouth, and a woebegone expression on his face.

"I don't care what you say," he remarked, "it wasn't Fraser's fault. He's done all he can to get

us a proper cricket club, and this is all the thanks he gets."

I am afraid that at the moment I was too much of a coward to speak my mind as Mobsley had done, but I shuffled over to Fraser's side, and took hold of one of his brace-buttons for support. Gale muttered something about Bowden being right, there was a whisper of "Soper's coming," and the gathering dispersed.

On the following morning we all had our impositions to do. Simpson and Bowden seized this as an opportunity for further prejudicing the minds of the others against Fraser; and as Mobsley and I continued in our allegiance to the latter, we found ourselves sharing his unpopularity. By dinner-time it became evident that we were to be "sent to Coventry." No one would speak to us, and even "Romulus" and "Remus" for once agreed on the subject of giving us the cold shoulder.

In the absence of other forms of recreation, this system of boycotting gave the other boarders something to do and think about in their spare time, and accordingly it was kept up day after day with unflagging severity. This may have been interesting enough for the other party, but it made life very dull and wretched for the victims. However, we found unexpected solace

for our woes ; and just as dark days in history have brought into existence men and parties whose fame will last till the end of time, so this dreary period of our school life caused the formation of that remarkable coalition which has been mentioned in the opening chapter as "Mobsley's Mohicans."

Left to our own devices, we three unfortunates climbed every afternoon into the loft, and there it was that I first became acquainted with the Great Book.

Mobsley possessed, among his other treasures, a tattered copy of "The Last of the Mohicans." He knew it nearly by heart, could repeat some of its more thrilling passages word for word, and was anxious that we should share the wealth of peril and adventures contained in its entralling pages. Reading it aloud, and occasionally breaking off to tell us in a briefer manner the less interesting portions of the narrative, he introduced us to his old friends David Gamut and the Major, and together we plunged into the depths of the primeval forest. The story soon cast upon us its magic spell. I have read it since, to find sadly that the charm has almost ceased to work ; but then we could hardly exist during the interval between one playtime and another, so anxious were

we to rejoin "Hawk-eye" and the Mohicans in their daring exploits.

The very fact of our keen interest in and great affection for the book caused us to criticise and take exception to some of its passages.

"By this time Duncan was thoroughly awake" (read Mobsley), "and he immediately lifted the shawl from the sleeping fair ones. Its motion caused Cora to raise her hand as if to repulse him, while Alice murmured, in her soft, gentle voice, 'No, no, dear father, we were not deserted; Duncan was with us.'"

"Bosh! humbug!" cried Fraser excitedly. "She said it on purpose, and she was as wide awake as you are. You don't green me with such stuff."

Even Mobsley shared with us the depraved spirit natural to a boy. At such a moving passage as—

"'Bless ye, bless ye! worthy man!' exclaimed the agitated father; 'whither have they fled? and where are my babes?'"

we all three snorted with indignation; while when, a little further on in the same page, there came such a sentence as—

"Ha! that rampaging devil again! There never

will be an end of his loping till 'Kill-deer' has said a friendly word to him"—

we smacked our lips and wagged our heads in unqualified approval of Hawk-eye's sentiments.

Once, indeed, Fraser was so far carried away as to very nearly lose his temper. Mobsley was continuing the story in impressive tones, intended to resemble those of the Scout,—

"And I will trail the varlets the length of the Horican, guaranteeing that not a shot of theirs shall, at the worst, more than break the skin, while "Kill-deer" shall touch the life twice in three times."

"We forget our errand," returned the diligent Duncan. "Come away; let us profit by this advantage, and increase our distance from the enemy."

"Give me my children," said Munro hoarsely; "trifle no longer with a father's agony, but restore me my babes!"

"*Oh, bother his babes!*!" shouted Fraser passionately. "Look here, Mobsley, if you read any more sickly rot like that, I'll lick you."

"But I must read what's put," answered the other apologetically.

"Well, what do people want to put women of that sort in books for?" continued Fraser, giving free passage to his wrath. "They always spoil everything. Out with those *gentle ones*. Heywood was a muff, and Munro was a drivelling old idiot. Why didn't he let 'Hawk-eye' shoot the Hurons? I wish I had his beastly 'babes' here; I'd drown 'em in a bucket!"

But in spite of this lack of appreciation of its softer passages, the book continued to charm us; and, what was more, so strong was its influence over us that the story began actually to creep into our lives.

We chose characters. Fraser seized upon "Hawk-eye," and named his catapult "Kill-deer;" Mobsley impersonated the majestic "Chingachgook;" and it was left for me to choose between David Gamut and Uncas. I did not wish to be the latter, because it was unpleasant to think that one had to die at the end of the book; and on the other hand, when Fraser suggested that I should be David and say "Even so," and pretend my policeman's whistle was the pitch-pipe, I shook my head. It was much more interesting to go about shooting, stabbing, tomahawking, and scalping people, than to be a mere singer of sacred songs; so at length I elected to be Uncas. And in one way the choice came

true; for though I did not die, I find I am indeed the "last of the Mohicans," and have therefore taken it upon myself to write this story.

We prowled about the garden, unimpeded by the presence of any "gentle ones," threading the trackless depths of the shrubbery, and surrounded by an atmosphere of adventure and danger. How many times "Chingachgook" saved our lives by his extraordinary skill in woodman's craft, or how often "Hawk-eye" drew the "death-shriek" from a stricken Huron, it would be impossible for me to say. The old book had left on our minds no particular impression of plot, except the idea of wandering about in the woods and wilderness, seeking to baffle and outwit some enemy. The man Brewer, we decided, should personate "Magca;" he was *Le Renard Subtil*, and we spoke of him with great relish as "the accursed Mingo."

Engrossed in this new form of amusement, we cared very little for the cold-shouldering of our other companions, but spent our playtime in a world of our own.

Our adventures were purely imaginary, all but one, which happened a few days before the commencement of the summer holidays.

It was a Saturday evening. Mr. Medlar was away. The day had been very hot, and we had chosen to do our preparatory work in the afternoon, and with the exception of "Chingachgook," "Hawk-eye," and myself, the boys had gone out for a walk with Mr. Soper.

We three had clambered into the loft, and there in the deepening twilight, sitting close to the one window, Mobsley read, in low, thrilling tones, the terrific incident of the blockhouse.

We were listening with breathless eagerness to the narrative.

"They are coming!" muttered Hayward, endeavouring to thrust his rifle through the chinks in the logs; "let us fire on their approach!"

"Hist!" suddenly interrupted Fraser. "What's that row?"

We were wound up to such a pitch as to be ready to jump at our own shadows. We listened with open mouths, with the blood throbbing in our ears.

There was a shuffling, scratching noise in the stable beneath. "It's a cat!" whispered Fraser.

It was the strangest cat I ever saw! A moment later the trap-door on the opposite side of the floor

was slowly raised, and a man's head came into view. It remained in sight only a few seconds, yet I saw it long enough to remember every feature, as I do even to the present time—close-cropped sandy hair, high cheek-bones, and no visible eyebrows. The stranger's glance wandered round the loft; then he seemed to catch sight of us; the trap-door dropped; there was a shuffle and a clatter of boots on the stones beneath, and all was once more silent.

"Who's that?" I gasped.

"A Huron dog," answered Fraser. "But I say," he added suddenly, "how could he have got there?"

It was not until "Hawk-eye" said this that we recognized what was the strangest feature in the occurrence. I have said before that we usually entered the loft through a hole in the floor above the manger; the proper ladder had disappeared long before, and this being the case, how had the stranger been able to thrust his head through the trap-door?

There was something uncanny about the whole affair; we had no longer any wish to remain where we were, and so beat a hasty retreat to the school-room.

Who was the mysterious individual who had interrupted our reading? and what did he want in



"We were listening with breathless eagerness to the narrative."

our loft? It was impossible to find an answer to these questions, and the problem remained unsolved.

We were destined, however, to see that face again; but how the owner climbed up to the trap-door without a ladder we never discovered; this has for ever remained a mystery, and is therefore worth recording.

CHAPTER VIII.

FORMATION OF THE FIRE BRIGADE.

COMING back after the vacation, we began the winter term in a more friendly spirit. Pocket-money was once more served out at regular intervals, and the feud against Fraser was forgotten. Mobsley was Mohican-mad, having read the book through five more times during the holidays, and persuaded us in private to once more assume our beloved characters. Fraser had brought back a new "Kill-deer," a ponderous catapult which would fire marbles. This was not often used, as we felt that firing away a real marble was a serious business, like letting off one of those big guns, each discharge of which costs an amount equal to an ordinary man's yearly income.

One change had taken place in our number. Brewer had left, and in his stead appeared a new fellow by the name of Spring. Being a clumsy, raw-boned individual, with the mien and bearing of a calf, we called him

“Gentle Spring”—an appellation which, to our disgust, he accepted as a compliment, and could never be made to understand that it was intended otherwise. It was an easy matter for a boy to distinguish himself in some way at Hanover House, and Spring’s peculiarity lay in the fact that he was the owner of a “museum.”

This museum he brought with him. It consisted of an old cigar-box, which, when thrown open to the public, was found to contain half a dozen copper coins, some battered birds’ eggs, a centipede in a bottle of spirits, a little Indian god, and a glass eye. The last-named exhibit was the one which most awakened our interest. We made gruesome inquiries as to whether it had ever “been in anybody’s head;” whereupon “Gentle Spring,” seeing the sensation which his possession excited, was tempted to affirm that it had belonged to a deceased relative.

We knew this was a fiction, yet strove hard to believe that the statement was true.

In giving these particulars, I may seem to be straying from my story; but, as the reader will presently discover, Spring’s “museum” was instrumental in bringing about a fresh state of rivalry and conflicting interests, which in turn led on to events calculated to shake our little society to its very foundations.

On the first half-holiday the same old question cropped up once more, "What shall we do?" Fraser had not forgotten the knockdown blows which he had received in trying to start a cricket club. He made some half-hearted suggestion that "Perhaps Medlar might get us a field to play football in, if we asked him." But the proposition was immediately met by a lively opposition.

"No fear!" answered Bowden. "Look here, Fraser, we don't want any more of those rows and bothers we had last term, so no more of your cricket and football clubs. Let's play 'brigands.'"

Once more we indulged in Fraser's fearful game; and once more, at the end of a short engagement, Wood was weeping, the twins fighting, Gale mending his face with stamp paper, and "Gentle Spring" inquiring in a dazed manner what had become of his collar and waistcoat. Evidently the sport was too violent, or we entered into it with too great enthusiasm. It was abandoned, and once more we found ourselves on our beam-ends, so to speak, for want of some fresh recreation. All kinds of things were tried: in view of last term's disaster, we were forbidden in our play to run against the boards, and this put an end to such games as "prisoner's base" and "catch smugglers."

Mr. Soper was approached and requested to furnish some idea on the subject.

Mr. Soper, be it said, was a man possessing a weak little body, with voice, and manner, and eyesight made to match. Mr. Soper thought the matter over, and then, with a knowing look, suggested "draughts;" and it being objected to that this was an indoor pursuit, he pondered again, and then, peering over his spectacles, uttered the one word "Hoops!"

"Soper's getting worse and worse," sighed Fraser. "We ought to put him in 'Gentle Spring's' museum."

Once more it was reserved for poor Mobsley to get us out of the difficulty.

I can see him now, standing in a corner of the stable with a woebegone look on his face, rubbing the strong-smelling contents of his little bottle on to his gums with the point of a grubby forefinger.

"'Chingachgook,'" said Fraser, "what are we to do?"

Every one turned to listen, expecting something original, and in this they were not disappointed. The Great Snake of the Mohicans pushed the squeaky cork back into his little bottle, remarking casually, "Let's start a fire brigade."

Everybody exploded, Simpson's tuneful voice ring-

ing high above the rest, like the hysterical screech of a beaten pig.

“A fire brigade!” he squeaked; “what rot!”

“It isn’t rot at all,” answered Mobsley stoutly. “Lots of places have private fire brigades, and why shouldn’t we?”

“But where’s the engine to come from?” asked “Romulus.”

“Why, that wheelbarrow squirt thing that’s out in the yard; it only wants a bit of indiarubber tubing and a fresh nozzle, and it would do finely.”

At this point it suddenly dawned upon us that the suggestion was really worthy of our consideration. During the holidays Mr. Medlar had, in a manner and for reasons best known to himself, become possessed of a second-hand portable watering-tank for garden use. This consisted of a sort of iron tub mounted on a frame with wheels and handles like those of a wheel-barrow, and fitted with a hand-pump, which, though at present slightly out of repair, could, as Mobsley said, with little trouble and expense be put once more in working order.

Fraser was at once fired with the idea, and saw a mental vision of himself arrayed in a brass helmet, saving distressed damsels from a burning house, and

bringing them down from a top-story window, slung over his shoulder, amidst the cheers of an excited crowd.

“Splendid!” he cried. “We’ll have a fire brigade. There’s really some object in that. We might save the whole place from being burnt down.”

We had never had any fear of fire before, and yet now it seemed astonishing that we should have gone on so long without taking some precautions against it—“Any night,” Wood remarked, “we might have been burnt in our beds”—and it was unanimously agreed to adopt Mobsley’s proposition.

“There’s an amateur fire brigade at Tutfield,” said Simpson; “my pater always presides at their annual dinner.”

“That’s a good notion, too,” cried Bowden. “We’ll have an annual dinner, or at all events a feed of some sort. Let’s do that first, and then settle about the brigade afterwards.”

The matter, however, was deemed too serious to allow of such an unimportant detail as a dinner being considered first. We felt that the safety of life and property was at stake; and Fraser, as usual, was red-hot to put the project into immediate execution.

Gale had greatly distinguished himself that morning

in mental arithmetic, and he was deputed to ask permission to use the watering-tank as an engine; Mobsley at the same time accompanying him to explain the project.

Mr. Medlar was in a good humour; perhaps he thought it would be rather a good thing, when parents came to see the place, to be able to mention casually that there was a fire brigade on the premises. At all events, he gave his consent, and the deputation retired with a rush to inform us of the result of their interview.

Immediately all was excitement. The money for repairing the engine was promised in the most patriotic manner, and the next business was the election of officers. As in the case of the cricket club, it was tacitly understood that "every one should be somebody," and it was judged good policy to propitiate the authorities by offering the captaincy to Mr. Soper. Mr. Soper was about as far removed from what would be one's usual ideas of a captain as the earth is from the planet Neptune: he wisely declined the honour, but consented to be superintendent—a post which in this instance might mean anything.

Fraser was elected captain, having previously offered the post to Bowden, but all the latter cared about was the annual dinner.

In view of the success of the deputation, Mobsley was made sub-captain, and Gale chief engineer. The former used his influence to have me made sergeant—a rank of which I was mightily proud at the time, but afterwards rather regretted when “Gentle Spring,” who was only a corporal, and jealous of my superior position, asserted his independence by knocking me down and breaking my favourite bone penholder.

Bowden styled himself “inspector,” “Romulus” was “driver,” and the rest assumed other titles of a more or less important nature.

The question of dress was eagerly discussed. Wood wanted a photograph taken to send home to his people. We began by suggesting brass helmets, and blue coats with silver buttons; but it ended in Fraser, as captain, appropriating my policeman’s whistle, which, when we paraded, he hung round his neck, and this, by the way, was the only thing in the shape of uniform that the brigade ever possessed.

Under the directions of our energetic leader we at once proceeded to business. Chief Engineer Gale undertook to procure the nozzle and bit of indiarubber hose requisite for putting the hand-pump in working order, while the rest of us collected half a dozen empty fruit and meat cans, to which we fitted cord handles;

and having filled them with water, hung them up on the pegs in the cloakroom, in imitation of a row of fire-buckets.

This occupied all our free time for that day, but we retired to rest feeling that the house and its occupants were in a good deal safer position than they had been on the previous night. It was remarked at supper that Superintendent Soper had had his hair cut, which we all attributed to a natural desire on the undermaster's part to do justice to his new rank by an extra smartness of appearance.

On the following morning, however, there was trouble. Somehow, in this world, whenever any work is undertaken for the public welfare, evil-minded people are bound to rise up and do all they can to hinder and if possible prevent its progress. The day boys objected to our water-cans hanging on their hat-pegs, and consequently threw them down, and played football with them in the stable. In addition to this, "Gentle Spring," still smarting with jealousy, informed other fellows of "young Dean's cheek in being a *sergeant!*!" whereupon half a dozen juvenile ruffians hunted me into a corner, pulled my hair, threw my cap over the wall, and pinched me till my arms were black and blue.

At length the boarders once more had the premises

to themselves: the battered cans were collected, and this time hidden away in a dark hole under the stairs, only to be brought out when required; and Fraser gave us orders for the day.

"We shan't have time for a drill this afternoon," he said; "but while the chief engineer mends the engine, we'll have an instruction class up in the loft."

A "class" sounded rather ominous. Wood asked whether we should have marks; to which the captain answered, "No, you ass!" and taking his seat on an old box, called upon us to give him our attention.

"In case of an alarm of fire," he began, "the first thing you must do is to rush down and assemble in the yard. Inspector Bowden and five men would carry the buckets, Chief Engineer Gale and the two Joneses would man the engine, and I should assume general directions."

"Supposing some one was upstairs, and couldn't get down," suggested Simpson, "how should we save them without ladders or a fire-escape?"

"Well," answered the captain, "supposing now that it was Miss Trigg, we'd get a blanket or a counterpane and hold it out under the window, and I should say, 'Miss Trigg, don't be afraid; jump, and we'll catch you.'"

“Jerusalem !” murmured “Romulus.” “Supposing she jumped wide, and came down on our heads, she’d break our necks.”

“The best joke would be to get old Mark to jump into the blanket,” said Bowden. “When we got him there, we wouldn’t let him out until we’d given the old beggar a good tossing.”

The idea of Mr. Medlar being tossed in a blanket in front of his burning residence struck us as rather fine. We had had no idea that fire-brigade work afforded such opportunities for enjoyment, and we almost wished that a conflagration would take place that very afternoon. Fraser, however, regarded the movement in a more serious light, and went on to give us further instructions as to how the brigade should act in case of a “call.”

“Now then,” he concluded, “I’m going to ask some questions, to see if you all understand what I mean.—Driver Jones, what should you do if you woke up in the night and found that the place was on fire ?”

“Well,” answered “Romulus” briskly, “I should jump up, alarm the rest of the brigade, collar hold of a blanket to toss people in, rush downstairs, fill the engine with water, drag it out—”

“Oh yes, you would, wouldn’t you ?” interrupted

“Remus,” *sotto voce*.—“I’ll tell you what Arthur’d do if he found the place was on fire. He’d just stick his head under the bedclothes !”

At this point “Romulus” turned and thumped the speaker on the head ; the brothers straightway seized each other. Captain Fraser, Inspector Bowden, and other members of the brigade in turn fell upon the combatants. The whole party rolled together on the floor of the loft, while from the centre of this mass of struggling humanity rose muffled exclamations of,—

“Shut up, Arthur.”—“Well, you shut up.”—“You began it.”—“I didn’t.”—“You did,” etc., etc., and so ended Fraser’s class.

The next afternoon we assembled for our first actual parade and drill. Gale had got his pump into working order, though in one way its performance was a trifle erratic, and resembled Fraser’s bugle. For some reason the sucker did not always act. You might work away at the lever for half a minute with no result, and then the water would suddenly come out with a rush.

Superintendent Soper was asked to be in command on this occasion ; but learning that the engine was to be really filled with water, he seemed anxious to give it a wide berth, and did not put in an appearance.

Of what subsequently happened I can only say that

it was entirely unpremeditated. Firemen, I suppose, should be ready for any emergency, and prepared to act with coolness and judgment whatever may take place. Still, it must be remembered that we were but raw recruits.

Fraser had drawn up a splendid "idea." The engine and six cans were filled with water and placed in the yard. The brigade were then to assemble at their desks in the schoolroom. At an unexpected moment Fraser would blow his whistle, and inform us what part of the premises was on fire, when we should turn out, rush to the spot with all possible speed, and commence operations.

The alarm was given, and it was the stable that was burning. We swept out of the schoolroom like a whirlwind. The water-carriers seized their cans, and Driver Jones, with the assistance of his brother and Chief Engineer Gale, brought the engine along at a hand gallop. So far so good. Arriving on the scene of action, Inspector Bowden and his men drew up in a line, awaiting further orders, while the captain gave the word for the engine to commence playing on a certain portion of the building. Chief Engineer Gale began working his lever, but at first with no result. "Romulus" turned the hose to see what was the

matter, and in so doing neglected to point the nozzle in the right direction. The next instant a stream of water suddenly spurted out, and flew with great accuracy and considerable violence into the engaging countenance of "Gentle Spring." The latter, believing that this was done on purpose, promptly retaliated by throwing the contents of his can over Driver Jones, and in another moment, instead of fighting the flames, we were fighting each other.

Words can scarcely describe the combat which ensued. Inspector Bowden and his party charged the engine, discharging the contents of their buckets as they advanced. Chief Engineer Gale, however, working his hose and lever as though it were a machine-gun, repulsed and routed them. Every one was drenched to the skin, including the captain, who thoughtlessly ventured into the line of fire when endeavouring to stop the conflict.

How long the engagement might have lasted it would be difficult to say; but just at a critical moment, when Simpson had been dragged to the ground, and "Romulus" was deliberately attempting to overturn the whole contents of the engine over him, Superintendent Soper appeared on the scene, and with some difficulty restored order.

We did the best we could to dry our things by the schoolroom fire; but the superintendent insisted on most of us going upstairs to change, and our appearance at tea in Sunday coats let the cat out of the bag. Mr. Medlar got some inkling of what had happened, and we were forbidden for the future to put water in the engine unless there was an actual necessity for so doing.

This mandate caused our interest in the fire brigade to wane. What was the good of a fire engine, we wanted to know, unless we could squirt water with it? "Romulus," however, hit on the brilliant idea of turning it into a sort of velocipede or chariot, in which one boy, sitting in the water-tank, was bowled along at a furious speed down the garden path. This amusement had been in progress but a short time one afternoon, when a specially rapid run ended in a grand smash-up in the entrance to the playground. The engine lost a wheel, a good portion of the gate-post was carried away in splinters, and "Gentle Spring," who happened to be the passenger, was flung out with great violence, and bit the dust in the middle of the playground. We replaced the wheel, and mended the gate-post by rubbing earth over the scars. Spring's face, however, which had suffered by coming into contact with the gravel,

was not so easy to repair. We were forced to go to Miss Trigg for medical aid. The catastrophe had to be described; and an order was issued forbidding us to use the fire-engine, except for strictly legitimate purposes.

It must have been about two days after this that Fraser made a discovery which, though of a trifling nature, was not without interest, especially when viewed by the light of subsequent events.

I have already said that down the right-hand side of the garden ran a thick shrubbery, behind which was the wall dividing Mr. Medlar's premises from those of old Greenaway. In about the centre of this wall was an old door, the original object of which we could not determine, as we had never seen it used or even opened. The shrubbery itself was supposed to be out of bounds; but here it was that "Hawk-eye," "Chingachgook," and myself were wont to roam, and enact scenes from our favourite book—the chance of being caught on forbidden ground giving a certain spice of reality to our imaginary adventure.

On the afternoon in question we were dodging about among the trees and bushes, when "Hawk-eye" halted suddenly before the door, and in a mysterious manner beckoned us to approach.

"Some one's been using this door," he said. "Look at that."

There were bright marks on the rusty bolt of the lock, and on some soft earth at our feet was the impression of a man's boot.

"Do the Maquas dare to leave the print of their moccasins in these woods?" quoted Mobsley.

"Seems like it," answered "Hawk-eye." "It must be Brewer, or perhaps old Greenaway himself. But what should they want here? I don't believe this door's ever been opened before."

We all three gazed at the footprint, but were completely at a loss to say how it had come there. Even the wisdom of "Chingachgook" could not account for its appearance.

CHAPTER IX.

DISBANDMENT OF THE FIRE BRIGADE.

IN spite of the restrictions mentioned in the previous chapter, we continued to take some interest in the fire brigade. We drilled in the stable, and performed feats of astonishing heroism in saving life from the loft. Still, without real water in the engine, the amusement grew rather tame ; and during intervals when it was not occupying our attention, a fresh hobby took hold of our fancy. This was nothing more nor less than a sudden rage for museums.

“ Gentle Spring’s ” collection put the notion into our heads ; and now we were all desirous of becoming the proprietors of similar shows.

The Joneses began first, and stored their specimens in an old hat-box. The catalogue of these rarities was at first rather brief, consisting of three exhibits only—namely, a Japanese ornament, a soap apple, and a horse’s tooth, which “ Remus ” declared was a lion’s.

Simpson was determined to outdo every one else, and had a special cabinet made for his museum, with a cupboard and four drawers. He was the only one who could afford such a luxury; but as he had nothing to put inside his case, the expenditure seemed rather useless. In view of this, Bowden came forward with a magnanimous proposal—namely, that if Simpson would agree to his being part owner of the cabinet, he would, on his part, deposit therein a curiosity of no little value. This consisted of a little tarnished brass earring, shaped like a bird, and Bowden declared it had been found in the ear of a mummy. At first we regarded this antiquity with awe and envy, but irreverent day boys, who were not affected with the museum craze, declared that it was unnecessary to go to Egypt for this style of antiquity, for trinkets of an exactly similar design had recently been discovered in halfpenny lucky packets sold at the corner shop. This rather shook our faith in the genuineness of the Bowden relic. The owner, however, stoutly denied the lucky packet theory, and the earring was carefully locked up in the cabinet.

Wood possessed a broken fossil, and on the strength of this announced his intention of starting a collection of geological specimens, which he arranged in a corner

of his desk, and carefully labelled with small stamp-paper tickets, bearing such inscriptions as "Serpentine," "Limestone," "Flint," etc. Among these one morning there suddenly appeared a dirty brick-end, marked "Garden Wall." This joke, perpetrated by Gale, I believe, rather took the fancy of the day boys, and Wood's desk became a receptacle for all kinds of specimens, not always of a strictly geological nature. Indeed, it was no uncommon thing, at the commencement of morning school, for him to be obliged to literally excavate for his books, which lay hidden under a heap of stones, fragments of crockery, broken bottles, and other *débris*.

At first Fraser was not infected, but when the idea did take hold of him he displayed his usual enthusiasm, and wrote home for some spun-glass ornaments and a dried starfish, wherewith to make a start.

Whatever Fraser did I tried to copy; and so, getting an empty collar-box, I labelled it "Kuriosetes," and deposited therein a bent halfpenny that had been run over by a railway train.

It was when this museum rage was just gaining strength among us that a terrible catastrophe happened which ended in the final disbandment of the fire brigade. At the time, various persons were blamed

for what took place. Superintendent Soper, Watkins (a day boy), and Driver Jones were all in turn accused of causing the disaster; so it will be my best plan to give an impartial account of the affair, and leave the reader to form his own judgment as to who was the responsible party.

Gale and Bowden had been having a discussion as to whether the "engine" would throw water on to the roof of the stable, and the former had surreptitiously filled the tank, waiting a favourable opportunity to test the power of the machine.

Just, however, as the trial was about to be made, Mr. Soper appeared upon the scene, and ordered Gale to wheel the engine back to its proper place in the yard.

"Please, sir," said the latter, "can't we leave the water in it?"

"Mr. Medlar said that it was to remain empty, unless there was some actual necessity for its being filled."

"But please, sir, if there *was* necessity, by the time we'd filled it from that tap in the yard the whole place might be burned down."

"Oh, we'll give you plenty of warning if there should ever be a fire," said the master carelessly; and

so the discussion ended. Gale wheeled the engine back into the yard, but chose to disregard the law about its standing empty, and so left it full of water.

The weather had been unusually warm for the beginning of October—so much so that we had not begun fires; but on this particular Wednesday it had come in cold and wet, and we had shivered as we sat at work in morning school. After dinner Mr. Medlar ordered a fire to be lit. Mr. Soper and Watkins, who was kept in for two lessons, had the schoolroom to themselves, Fraser having insisted, in spite of the weather, that the brigade should muster in the playground for setting-up drill. At length, a good two hours after the remainder of his comrades had been dismissed, the prisoner finished his task, and prepared to go home.

“Watkins,” said Mr. Soper, glancing up at the wet window-pane, “as you go just tell these boys there is a fire in here, and they’d better come inside.”

The words had hardly been spoken when Mr. Medlar entered the room, followed by a lady and gentleman, whom he was evidently showing round the premises.

“This, as you will perceive, is our schoolroom,” he remarked. “Plenty of air, plenty of light, and a separate desk for every boy. If you will permit me,

I will give you a synopsis of the work we have been doing this term."

Watkins rushed out to the cloakroom, seized his belongings, and not wishing to lose any more time in getting home to his dinner, came to the top of the path leading down to the playground, and shouted. We looked up, and saw him standing there, brandishing his umbrella. He yelled one sentence, and then disappeared,—

"Hi, you fellows! Soper told me to tell you THERE'S A FIRE IN THE SCHOOLROOM!"

* * * * *

Reader, unless you have ever been a "sergeant" in an amateur fire brigade, and suddenly received your first summons to "turn out," you cannot understand what my feelings were at this moment; my heart jumped into the top of my head. Not one of us had for a single moment the slightest doubt as to the meaning of the message, and we all firmly believed that the schoolroom was in flames.

"My word!" said Gale. "He *said* he'd give us warning if ever we were wanted!"

"Quick! man the engine!" shouted Fraser.—"And you other fellows, get your buckets!"

The "captain," the "chief engineer," and the two

Joneses raced madly up the path, the rest of us following in a wild stampede. Only one member of the brigade so far disgraced himself as to actually shirk his duty and show the white feather, and that was Wood. He remained trembling in the playground, expecting, I rather think, that even there he would be burned to death.

No flames were as yet bursting through the roof of the building, but we pictured the fire gaining ground every instant, and I'm sure I never ran so fast in my life before.

"We must save our museum!" panted Bowden. "The mummy's earring—I wouldn't lose it for worlds!"

The advance party dashed into the yard and seized the engine. There were still no signs of a conflagration; but we hardly waited to look, and following Inspector Bowden, rushed off to get our buckets. It was while we were thus engaged that the great catastrophe happened; and though unable to describe it as an eye-witness, I can give a pretty accurate account of what took place.

It must be explained that the ground in the rear of the house was rather higher than in front, and the back entrance to the schoolroom was approached by a sloping path, which ended in three stone steps.

“We must run the engine up to the door!” cried Fraser. “Now then, send her along!”

Driver Jones, his brother, and the chief engineer exerted all their strength, and “sent her along” with a will. Down the short path they went at headlong speed.

“Hallo! Steady on!” yelled the captain. “The steps! Look out!”

Mr. Medlar stood in front of his desk, talking to his visitors in his most imposing manner.

“I should think you find it difficult to keep so many boys in order,” remarked the lady. “It is almost more than I can do to look after one.”

“My dear madam,” answered the head-master, with a complacent smile, “discipline is an art, or perhaps, more properly speaking, it is a science, and must be studied as such. During my long experience I have had plenty of opportunity of adding to my knowledge by practical tests, and thereby perfecting a system which I flatter myself leaves little to be desired. The old notion of the schoolmaster as a man with a book in one hand and a stick in the other has now, happily, been discarded; and it is quite possible, I maintain, with the due exercise of wisdom and discretion, for any man to obtain, without unnecessary strictness and severity,

the same orderly conduct and satisfactory behaviour which—”

Bump—bump! *Crash!* BANG—BANG!

The gentleman started, the lady screamed. Old Mark clutched at his desk, while Mr. Soper sprang from his seat and tumbled over a form.

Before it could be stopped, the fire-engine had plunged wildly down the stone steps. Like a war-chariot, a thunderbolt, and a battering-ram all rolled into one, it smashed open the door, and bounding across the room, wrecked a desk, stove in the front of a cupboard, and then overturning, emptied the water which it contained all over the schoolroom floor. A perfect flood swept round the recumbent form of Superintendent Soper, and drenched him to the skin. Driver Jones and Chief Engineer Gale, still holding the handle of the machine, were dragged along in its wake; Captain Fraser entered the room with what seemed a feeble attempt at a double somersault; while the remains of “Remus” were scattered somewhere outside.

For a moment or so everything was in confusion; then Mr. Medlar found his tongue.

“What is the meaning of this?” he cried.

As though in answer to the question, there was a

rush of feet. With a yell Inspector Bowden and party charged into the room, and, falling over the prostrate forms of their comrades, discharged their home-made buckets like hand-grenades in all directions. To complete the picture, imagine a small boy who came last standing appalled upon the threshold, a gaily ornamented fruit-can in his hand, and a look of terror on his face—and this, dear reader, was “young Dean.”

“Bowden—Fraser,” gasped the head-master, “what is the meaning of this? Answer me this moment!”

In spite of the imperative tone in which the question was asked, it had to be twice repeated before any one plucked up courage to reply.

“Please, sir,” faltered Fraser, “Mr. Soper sent to tell us there was a fire in the schoolroom.”

The unfortunate “superintendent,” who was doing his best to wring out his dripping garments, over-hearing himself accused of being the cause of this riotous behaviour, literally staggered with astonishment.

“Bless me!” he exclaimed. “I meant there was a *fire in the grate!*”

* * * *

I will not dwell longer on a distressing situation.

No new boy came, so I am afraid that the lady and gentleman were not favourably impressed with what they had seen; but what concerned us more closely was that the fire brigade was disbanded. We were all called upon to resign our rank; and to prevent further mishaps, the engine was sold to a dealer in old iron.

Deprived in this manner of one of our hobbies, we began to bestow additional attention on the other. The museum rage increased, and a strong feeling of rivalry began to spring up between the various proprietors. "Gentle Spring" boasted of his glass eye, the Joneses sang the praises of their soap apple and lion's (horse's) tooth, whilst Bowden and Simpson declared that the mummy's earring "beat the lot."

This wish to possess the best collection led to an amalgamation of different parties. Spring joined Simpson and Bowden. Gale, who prided himself on the possession of some military buttons and a puzzle match-box, figuratively speaking cast his lot into the Joneses' hat-box; while Fraser, Mobsley, and I decided to deposit our curiosities in "Hawk-eye's" play-box.

Ours was undoubtedly the feeblest collection of the lot. Fraser's starfish was falling to pieces, and his glass ornaments were nothing out of the common;

a bent halfpenny was nothing to boast of; and Mobsley's contribution, which consisted of a stone that looked like a big toe, was really rubbish. Nevertheless, our museum was destined to contain the most valuable and most interesting curiosity of the lot; and how it came into our possession it will now be my business to relate.

One afternoon, shortly before tea, we three were wandering about in the shrubbery. With the leaves beginning to fall, it was less of a trackless forest than it had been; but a thick outer fringe of evergreens afforded us a certain amount of shelter.

“Hawk-eye” was armed with his new “Kill-deer,” and had been firing pebbles at the trunk of a tree. Now he loaded with a marble, and looked about for some object worthy of this expensive form of projectile. Suddenly a starling settled on a branch above our heads.

“‘Yes, Huron,’” said the Scout,” quoting from a well-remembered passage, “‘I could strike you now, and no power on earth could prevent the deed. The soaring hawk is not more certain of the dove than I am at this moment of you, did I choose to send a bullet to your heart!’”

We were not so sure of “Hawk-eye’s” skill. “Chin-

gachgook" and I wished to see it put to the test, and urged him in a whisper to try a shot.

There was no Munro present to stop the sport by wailing about his babes; and so *Le Longue Carabine* took a careful aim, and the next moment, greatly to our surprise, the bird was knocked off its perch, and fell dead a few yards from our feet.

The stern "Chingachgook" (whose love for animals I have already referred to) immediately repented of his share in the deed, and, I think, was nearly moved to tears when he picked up the warm body. Fraser, however, was exultant.

"Hurrah! there's a shot for you!" he exclaimed. "Look here, let's dissect it."

"No, let's bury it," said Mobsley, smoothing the ruffled feathers with his finger. "You remember," he added, "like 'Hawk-eye' buried the Mohawks who had been killed outside the blockhouse."

We were rather taken with the idea, and I went to fetch a trowel. The place chosen for the interment was close to the wall, in a corner formed by a buttress, not far from the disused green door. I took a spell at digging, and then Fraser relieved me. At length he paused.

"Hallo!" he remarked, "what's this?"

At the bottom of the hole, which was now a little over half a foot deep, there appeared some coarse stuff, like an end of dirty sacking. The hole was enlarged, and as the earth was cleared away more sacking came to light, until we scooped out a little solid bundle.

“There’s something hard inside it,” said Fraser.
“What can it be? Some animal’s skull?”

He took hold of a corner of the dirty wrapping, gave it a careless shake, and out rolled a curiously shaped tankard of dull white metal. We eyed it in astonishment.

“A pewter pot!” said Mobsley.

Fraser picked it up, rubbed it over with the sleeve of his jacket, and glanced at the bottom.

“Pewter!” he exclaimed. “Grandmother! why, look here, it’s solid silver!”

With a gasp of amazement we all grabbed at the treasure, and subjected it to a critical examination. There was no doubt about its being silver. It was very finely chased, and on the front, in a sort of shield, a crest was engraved, under which ran a Latin motto. We were some little time taking in all these details; and then the question was, How did it get there? and to whom did it belong?

Each one of us had some different theory. I sug-

gested that it might belong to old Greenaway, but this was pooh-poohed by the others. Why should old Greenaway want to bury his treasure? and why should he do it in our garden, instead of in his own? In addition to this, we knew that our neighbour did not possess a crest.

Fraser thought that robbers must have buried it there; but Mobsley had a still more attractive theory to offer—namely, that at the time of the Civil War some Royalist living at Hanover House or in the neighbourhood had buried his plate to save it from the Roundheads, and either forgotten where it was, or for some reason neglected to dig it up again.

“What shall we do with it?” I asked.

“Do with it?” answered Fraser; “why, stick it in our museum. My eye! won’t the other chaps be jealous!”

“I don’t think we’d better let any one know we’ve got it,” answered Mobsley.

“Why not?”

“Because if it’s known that any one’s found a treasure, they have to give it up to the Queen.”

This we declared to be “beastly unfair;” but Mobsley was sure that such was the law.

“Well, as we found it, I don’t see why we shouldn’t

keep it," answered Fraser. "If Bowden or Simpson knew about it, they'd try and get it taken away from us out of spite ; so perhaps we'd better keep it dark for the present. But, my senses, what a find ! I should think it's worth pounds."

At that moment the tea-bell rang. We hastily put the dead bird in the hole, shovelled the earth over, and wrapping the tankard once more in the old piece of bagging, we hid it, on our way to the house, among the stones of a little rockery.

None of us, I am afraid, did much work that evening ; and just before supper we crept out, and by the light of single matches, which Mobsley struck in a corner of the stable, once more examined our treasure.

Whose was it ? How did it come to be buried in the shrubbery ?

None of us could say. We all agreed, however, that "finding's keeping," and Fraser carried the prize upstairs under his coat, and deposited it in his play-box.

That night, after Wood was asleep, Mobsley told a thrilling story about a cavalier who had buried his plate, and, without disclosing the secret of its whereabouts to his family, had gone off and got killed in the wars. Now, at certain seasons of the year his spirit haunted the place, vainly endeavouring to call the attention

of his descendants to the spot where the treasure was concealed.

This dreadful narrative, coming on the top of a big slice of Dutch cheese (the gift of "Romulus" and "Remus"), caused me to have awful dreams, in which I saw a terrible spectre advancing towards me through the old green door, and found myself utterly unable to run away.

CHAPTER X.

THE BATTLE OF CARLSHAM PARK.

“ **L**OOK here, there’s something up with you three fellows,” said Bowden; “ you’re always whispering together. What’s the lark ? ”

The “ lark ” was nothing more or less than the silver cup. We could think of little else, and made all kinds of excuses for getting Wood out of the bedroom, in order that we might open Fraser’s play-box and look at our treasure; for since Mobsley had polished it up with a bit of wash-leather, we were no longer in doubt as to its value. We took the trowel into the shrubbery, and dug fresh holes, expecting to find more treasure—for the cavalier in Mobsley’s story had buried there the whole of his plate—but we made no further discoveries.

It is a difficult matter at this length of time to remember exact dates, but it must have been soon after this that one afternoon Fraser and I, strolling

down to Stockingham, paused outside the Grammar School playing-field, and looked in through the iron bars of the gate. It was just that bright, crisp autumn weather that makes one long to run about. The school were playing Penston—we could tell that from the colours of the jerseys; the teams were evenly matched, and from the excitement shown by the spectators, it was evidently “anybody’s game.” Just as we arrived the visitors made a determined rush, and for a few moments a hot skirmish raged in front of the home goal. It was not far from where we stood. We heard the stamp of feet, the thud of the leather, and short, breathless words of command; then Gregg, the school back, cleared with a splendid kick, which sent the ball far away down the field. The spectators sent up a yell of approval, and even Fraser and I, two poor outsiders, danced and shouted with delight.

“My eye!” exclaimed Fraser, holding on to the gate, and hopping about impatiently like a young bird beating itself against the bars of a cage, “I *should* like to play. I wish old Mark could get us a field.”

“Oh, it’s no good trying for that,” I answered. “We should only have the same bother as we had about the cricket, and none of the others would back us up.”

Fraser was silent, but his heart was once more filled

with a burning desire for us to play some better game than "brigands," and that evening he mentioned it to Mr. Soper.

"Please, sir, don't you think Mr. Medlar ought to let us play football?"

"Why?" asked the "superintendent," glancing up from his book as though the question were rather astonishing.

"Why, sir, other boys do when they're at school; and when we leave we shall have to work, and then we shan't have any time."

"Superintendent" Soper, I believe, had never played a game of football in his life, and, like "old Mark" himself, did not realize that there was any absolute necessity for our doing so; he had a kind heart, however, and something in Fraser's answer made him smile. He pooh-poohed the suggestion; but after we had gone to bed, he interviewed the head-master on the subject, and the following morning made this extraordinary announcement,—

"I have spoken to Mr. Medlar, and he says that if you like to provide yourselves with a football, you may play occasionally on half-holidays in Carlsham Park."

We all shouted, stamped, squealed, and danced, until

the unfortunate “superintendent,” in order to quell the disturbance, was forced to pull out his little black notebook, and go through the motions of putting down all our names for punishment.

The neighbouring park had a large stretch of grass which was used as a public recreation-ground, and this we thought would be as good as a playing-field.

The ball was subscribed for and purchased, and on Wednesday afternoon, the thirty-first of October, we sallied forth under the care of Mr. Soper to play our first game. Fraser was jubilant, the Joneses were carrying on a heated discussion as to the ownership of a red-and-white cricket-belt, and even Simpson appeared eager for the sport. It was splendid weather, and our prospects themselves seemed to have changed to “set fair.”

Alas that instead of the bright and happy picture of an afternoon’s play, such as from the foregoing remarks the reader has a right to expect—alas, I say, that I should be obliged to relate what really happened!

We picked up sides, marked the goals with coats, and began to play. It may have been a very different kind of football from that seen on the Grammar School ground, but we enjoyed it immensely. It was some-

thing, indeed, to feel the grass under our feet, instead of the muddy gravel of the playground. Mr. Soper stood watching us for a few minutes, and then strolled away along a winding path among the trees.

Wednesday was the early-closing day in Stockingham, and we had not been at our game very long before about a score of noisy, untidy-looking boys, set free from their work, commenced playing on the grass some little distance away. They had a flabby ball without an atom of bounce in it, and when it was not available they kicked each other; thus their game proceeded with a great deal of rough play and shouting. Suddenly their ball collapsed altogether, and went flat like an opera hat. It was impossible to continue under these circumstances, and so, after throwing about the empty case, they came slowly across to where we were, and began to encroach on our ground.

“I say, mister,” exclaimed one of the leaders, “let us join in.”

“No, thanks,” answered Fraser.

“Well, look ’ere,” returned the other, “our club’s the Hevening Star, and we’ll play your lot.”

“No, you won’t,” answered Fraser. “We can get along very well as we are.”

There was some muttered conversation among the

strangers, and the next moment, without any invitation, they rushed into our midst, and joined in the game, kicking the ball here, there, and everywhere, bowling us over, and shouting, "'Ere ye are, Tommy!"—"Now then, 'Arry!"—"Play hup, Hevening Star!"

The first thing I knew was that some one charged me violently in the back, causing me to gambol on the grass like an acrobat; and when I had done turning somersaults, and attempting to dig holes in the ground with my head, I saw Mr. Soper advancing at a run from a neighbouring path.

"What's this? what's this?" he cried breathlessly. "Leave that ball alone! D'you hear me?"

The members of the "Hevening Star" club did not seem to be very much impressed with the under-master's appearance.

"'Ark at him!" cried one. "Now then, little 'un, mind yer glasses!" exclaimed another; while the leader of the gang, who, we gathered, rejoiced in the name of Tommy Bray, gave the ball a tremendous kick, which sent it flying off in the direction of their original pitch, the crowd of rascals following it in high glee.

"Have nothing to do with them," panted Mr. Soper. "Keep where you are, and I'll go and fetch the park-keeper or a policeman."

He started off at a trot, and the enemy, seeing us standing in this helpless and forlorn condition, greeted us with a yell of derision.

“Look here,” said Fraser hotly: “we aren’t going to let them kick our ball about with their beastly hob-nailed boots; let’s go and fetch it back.”

The fighting blood of “Romulus” and “Remus” was stirred in a moment; like war-horses they pawed the earth and snuffed the battle.

“Yes, come along!” they cried. “Hurrah!”

The next moment we were on the move—that is, with the exception of Bowden and Simpson, who made off hurriedly in the opposite direction. I have already confessed that I was but a small, insignificant youngster, who could not claim to be considered stout either of heart or limb; but I suppose I had a microscopic fragment of grit in me, which made it my worse fear to be thought afraid, and so, all of a tremble, I followed in rear of our line of battle.

What follows may seem of little moment to the reader, but in the History of Hanover House it corresponds to the Pass of Thermopylæ or the Charge of the Light Brigade, and every detail of the engagement is firmly fixed in my memory.

The enemy outnumbered us two to one; and as we

advanced, most of them did not even trouble to pause in their game. Some, however, saw that we meant business, and so turned to give battle.

“Gentle Spring” was the first to go into action. He was, as I have said, a lumbering, raw-boned youth, and seemed fair game for the enemy. One of them, accordingly, rushed on him, threw him down, and kicked him. Spring slowly rose to his feet, straightened his cap, which had fallen forward on to his nose, and then, without any haste or show of temper, gave his opponent a box on the ear of such astonishing strength that the recipient withdrew from the field weeping. This young gentleman’s brother, whom his comrades addressed as “’Arry,” came up blustering in grand style. “’Ere, Guy Fawkes,” he began, “what d’ye think you’re a-doing of? Who—” Spring heard him thus far, and then, with a sheepish grin, dealt him a blow on the side of the head which sounded like the chunk of a chopper on a wooden block. “’Arry” went over like a ninepin. “Gentle Spring” waited politely until he had regained his feet, and then deliberately knocked him down again.

“ But meanwhile in the centre
Great deeds of arms were wrought.”

“Romulus” and “Remus,” appearing for once on the

same side, fought shoulder to shoulder like tiger-cats, until opponents considerably taller and bigger drew back and called them names at a respectful distance. Mobsley and I had no sooner got into the *mélée* than we were upset and trampled on, while Wood crawled off to the rear with a handkerchief applied to his nose. Fraser and Gale plunged heedlessly into the heart of the foe, and seized the ball ; we gathered round them, and then the situation became critical indeed. With the ball "held," all the players turned their attention to ourselves. "Gentle Spring" having at last found an antagonist who would stand up to him, was just beginning to show some interest in a fight with a butcher's boy ; and Fraser, the Joneses, and Gale were practically the only effective men we had left.

The representatives of the "Hevening Star," who had been scattered about the ground, now came running up, breathing out threats and oaths. Two of them rushed on Fraser ; he had the ball under one arm, and could not defend himself against this combined attack. I could not bear to see him hurt, so I sprang forward and caught the young rough round the waist. He struck me down with a thump on the top of the head ; but the action impeded his progress, and before he could get at Fraser, Gale caught him a good

right-hander on the nose, which immediately drew blood.

His comrades did not relish the sight of this; they hung back for a moment, eyeing our little group as though they realized that it might prove rather a difficult nut to crack. Then Tommy Bray, towering head and shoulders above the rest, elbowed his way to the front, crying, "Come on! let's rush 'em!"

"Romulus" had one eye bunged up, and a cut on his cheekbone; "Remus" was also damaged; and Fraser and Gale were out of breath. A combined attack could but have ended with one result.

But Fate decreed that the battle should not be to the strong. As the enemy prepared to charge, Mobsley suddenly did an extraordinary thing: he stepped forward, and pulling the little bottle of toothache mixture out of his waistcoat pocket, cried in a shrill, determined tone, "Look here! If any of you come near me, I'll throw this over you! I will! and it burns like fire!"

The probable effect of the mixture when applied externally was no doubt exaggerated in this speech; but the threat had an astonishing effect. Tommy Bray, it so happened, had once been errand-boy to a chemist. "Look out!" he cried; "it's hacid!"

"Wot's hacid?" queried two or three voices.

“Why, it’ll burn yer blooming eyes out!” answered Tommy.

His comrades hesitated, and at this moment Mobsley suddenly took it into his head to make a counter-attack. He dashed forward; the enemy scattered to right and left with a yell of dismay; and at that moment Mr. Soper appeared on the scene with the park-keeper, who was armed with a stick.

So, for the time being, ended our conflict with the “Hevening Star” marauders, and mightily pleased we were with the result.

Mr. Medlar, on the other hand, was highly indignant both with Tommy Bray and his followers, and also with us. He declared that he was surprised and shocked at our conduct, and that we ought to have known better than to commit ourselves to a combat with such an unworthy foe; indeed, instead of congratulating us on the laurels we had won, he went so far as to show his marked disapproval of the affair by confiscating our football, and declaring there should be no more games in the park.

I suppose now I should hesitate before engaging in a head-punching match with a party of street urchins; but then, I must confess, we none of us considered that we had done anything to be ashamed of. Even the loss

of the football and the prospect of no further games could not rob us of the sense of triumph which we experienced when reviewing our victory. The coming of the park-keeper was like the timely arrival of the Prussians at Waterloo ; but the determined aggressive movement of Mobsley with his toothache medicine resembled the advance of the English line : it had already broken the enemy, and we could therefore claim that we had won the day.

Assembling after tea in the schoolroom, we fought our battle over again. Everybody congratulated everybody else, and as a result of this breach of the peace an astonishing amount of amiability and good-fellowship prevailed. John Jones and Arthur Jones actually embraced before the whole company, each pronouncing the other a “brick ;” and even I, whose sole achievement had been to get knocked down and walked about on, was congratulated on my prowess.

“ You’d have got a crack on the head, Fraser,” said Gale, “ only young Dean collared hold of the chap round the waist. He did—like a good ’un. I shouldn’t have thought he had it in him, young shrimp !”

“ What made you think of doing that with your bottle of physic, Mobsley ? ” asked “ Romulus.”

"It was a sudden inspiration. I thought it might funk them," answered "Chingachgook" gravely; and then added, in an impressive undertone, "The Great Snake of the Mohicans has coiled himself in their wigwams, and has poisoned their triumph."

But perhaps what caused us the greatest amount of surprise was the conduct of "Gentle Spring." One would never have recognized in this raw-boned, ungainly-looking individual the "first-class fighting man," and we gathered round him to express our admiration of his prowess.

"I always thought he was a regular old pudding-head," said Fraser, addressing the crowd; "and now, why, bother it all, the chap turns out to be a regular lion!—How is it you never licked any of us?" he added, turning to the hero. "You're the best man of the lot, and yet you let us call you names, and never said anything."

"I thought it was rather a nice name," answered "Gentle Spring" sheepishly. "Besides, I don't want to fight any one."

"But you *can* fight; you could fight any of us."

"I'm a bit strong," answered the lion modestly; and then, surveying his big paws, he added thoughtfully, "I can crack nuts." What he meant to imply by this

last remark we did not clearly understand at the moment, but from that time forward "Gentle Spring" appeared before us in a new light, and rose steadily in our estimation.

The proceedings were not altogether of a harmonious nature. Ever since the commencement of the conflict in the Park we had been feeling enraged at Bowden and Simpson for having so basely deserted us in the hour of trial. Up to this time we had regarded the former as sharing with Fraser the honourable position of cock of the walk, but now he had been exposed, and even "Remus" (the battle spirit being still strong upon him) informed me in an aside that he would "punch Bowden's head for tuppence."

"Look here, you two!" said Fraser. "We want to know why you sneaked off and left us. If young Dean didn't turn tail, I can't see why you should."

"I wasn't going to fight with a lot of cads," answered Bowden.

"Nor I either," added Simpson. "Why, at Tutfield—"

"Oh, shut up about Tutfield!" interrupted Fraser. "Of course you wouldn't fight; and why? Why, simply because you're a couple of wretched funks!"

The speaker turned upon his heel with a contemp-

tuous snort, and it seemed that there the matter had ended ; but as we went upstairs that night, I saw him engaged in an earnest conversation with Spring, Gale, and "Romulus."

"Get into bed, but don't take all your things off," said Fraser, as he entered the room.

"Why not ?"

"Why, because after Soper's been round we're going to punish Bowden and Simpson for deserting. It's all right ; Medlar and Miss Trigg are both out."

A quarter of an hour later we met the twins in the passage, and marched boldly into the opposite bedroom.

"Hallo !" exclaimed Bowden, sitting up in bed. "What d'you fellows want here ? Just clear out !"

"Charles Bowden and Reginald Moncrieff Simpson," said Fraser, with much solemnity, "you lie there charged with having basely deserted your comrades in the face of an enemy. You are now to receive punishment, and it only remains for us to decide what form it is to take."

"Bosh !" answered Bowden.—"Here, you chaps, let's turn 'em out !"

Spring and Gale laughed, but remained sitting on their beds ; seeing which, Bowden made no attempt to carry out his proposal single-handed.

“We never thought you meant to fight those chaps,” said Simpson. “We were going off to help Soper find the park-keeper.”

“Of course we were,” added Bowden.

“What’s the sentence to be?” said Fraser stolidly.

“I should say that for deserting us they ought to be held down over a bed, and every one bang them in turn with a slipper,” answered Gale.

“Pooh! who’ll do the holding?” cried Bowden, with a glance of defiance.

“I will,” murmured “Gentle Spring.”

“And I should say,” added Mobsley gravely, “that for telling lies they ought each to have a dose of young Dean’s cod-liver oil.”

Both sentences were carried out. Bowden was operated on first, and made some show of resistance, until Spring quietly took hold of his hands.

“Oh! o—o—oh! Shut up! shut up! O—o—oh!” cried the victim, and it then dawned upon us what “Gentle Spring” had meant about cracking nuts.

After that we had no further trouble. I gladly fetched my cod-liver oil. It was a beverage for which I had no great liking, but was obliged, under orders from home, to empty a bottle each term. It gave me, therefore, no little satisfaction to see the amount

lessened by two very generous doses, which were administered by Spring with all the suave politeness of a medical attendant.

After having been well slippered by the whole company, the two culprits were allowed to take shelter once more in their respective beds, and we prepared to withdraw.

“All right, Fraser,” growled Bowden. “This is all your doing, I know. You’ve got a spite against me; but I’ll be even with you some day.”

CHAPTER XI.

A MODERN GUNPOWDER TREASON.

MY cod-liver oil seemed to have disagreed with Bowden and Simpson. For some days they sulked, and saved us the trouble of sending them to Coventry by betaking themselves there of their own accord. I and other smaller boys would probably have fared badly had not the Concert of the Powers, and especially the recollection of "Gentle Spring's" nut-cracking gift, afforded us protection.

For two whole nights Mobsley had frantic toothache, and there were no stories told in our bedroom. Some people think a swollen face a good subject for a comic illustration, and even joke about a visit to the dentist, but such unfeeling persons would be ready to poke fun at grim Death himself. I suppose, in the happy time to come, "painless dentistry" will be available for everybody; but in Hanover House days we patronized

a neighbouring chemist, whose fee was a shilling, and whose skill was in proportion to his charge.

Poor Mobsley! We tried every household remedy we could think of. We induced him to swill his mouth with salt water. We poked hot onions in his ear, and nearly flayed his cheek with pepper plasters, but all to no purpose; and at last the terrible truth seemed to impress itself upon his mind that there was no cure but the dreadful steel.

“It’s no good,” he murmured; “I must go down to old Brewster’s and have it out.

“I suppose I’m a beastly funk,” added the unfortunate “Chingachgook.” “Those chaps in the ‘Mohicans’ didn’t seem to care a straw when they were going to be shot, or even tortured to death, and here I can’t make up my mind to have a tooth drawn.”

He did make up his mind, however, and then went, as his immortal namesake would have done, “with a calmness and fortitude that none but an Indian warrior would have known how to exercise.”

“Hawk-eye” and “Uncas” accompanied him, but drew back at last when the red and green bottles came in view, and “The Great Serpent” went in alone. At the sight of him (I know I was a feeble little shrimp) my heart rose into my throat, which, resenting the

unaccustomed presence of that organ, began to ache in such a manner as brought tears to my eyes. Even that man of iron the "Scout" was not unmoved. He stuck his hands in his pockets and whistled; but I saw through the manœuvre.

We waited a long time, every moment of which I fancied that "Chingachgook," my father, must be experiencing the awful wrench. Then he reappeared with rapture written plainly on his face.

"Is it out?"

He nodded, and held up a small pill-box. We examined its gory contents, and shuddered.

"I didn't make a sound," he said triumphantly, "and old Brewster told me I was a brick, and gave me back the money. After all, he isn't a bad old chap."

A few moments ago we would have bound Brewster to the stake, but now his calling did not seem so dreadful. Our hearts went out to him, and we were ready to regard him as a public benefactor.

We were gaily pursuing our homeward way, when Fraser plucked me by the sleeve.

"Look!" he said; "there's Dick Adams."

The man was standing gazing into a shop window, and we came up to him before he was aware of our presence. He was always trig and tidy in former

days, but now he seemed even more shabby and wretched than at the time of our last meeting.

“Hullo, Dick ! what are you up to ?”

He looked round, and answered shortly, “Nothing.”

“But how’s that ? Can’t you get work ?”

The man seemed anxious at first to turn away and avoid us ; but we had been old friends, and so he paused and answered our questions.

“I’ve had odd jobs,” he said. “But maybe you remember I had an accident once that left me with a weak knee, and it gives way with heavy work. I could manage very well what I had to do at Mr. Greenaway’s.”

“Silly old fool !” cried Fraser. “Why doesn’t he have you back ?”

“Well, he was a good master in many ways,” answered Dick ; “but he’s a bit near, and this other chap got hold of him somehow, and offered to do the work for less.”

“The accursed Mingo !” hissed “Chingachgook.”

For a few moments we lingered talking. We could do nothing for the man but express our sympathy, and that seemed a poor thing to offer a person who might be hungry. As we wished him good-bye, Mobsley suddenly slipped a shilling into his hand.

“It’s not much,” he said, “but you must take it. Don’t say you won’t!”

“It’s very kind of you young gentlemen to think so much about a chap like me,” muttered Dick; “but—well, as you were sayin’, we did use to have some fun together once.”

He dropped the coin into his pocket, but, ah me! he little knew its real value, and that it was the price of blood!

“I hope you don’t mind,” said Mobsley apologetically, as we turned into the Carlsham Road—“I hope you don’t mind my having given it to him. I might have bought fireworks, but I felt awfully sorry for poor old Dick. He made that cage that I used to have for my white mice.”

The mention of fireworks was due to the fact that it was now Monday, the third of November. If Mr. Medlar showed himself lacking in sympathy for football and cricket, he certainly allowed us some latitude as regards the glorious “Fifth;” and we usually made the most of the anniversary by commencing a series of minor celebrations several days beforehand.

On the previous Saturday the fun had begun, when we bombarded old Long, the drill sergeant, with Chinese crackers. Old Long had helped to storm the

great Redoubt at the Alma, had taken his part in "the Soldiers' Battle," and stood unflinching at his post through the long hours of dark winter nights in the advanced trenches before Sebastopol; nevertheless his stern spirit blenched before a fire of Chinese crackers, and he querulously declared that unless we "stopped it" he'd report the whole lot to the head-master. As he finished speaking another cracker went off in his over-coat pocket, and that settled the matter. At the close of school we were kept at our seats for half an hour by Mr. Medlar, who declared that any one letting off fire-works before the appointed time would be severely punished. But in spite of this order, a few minutes later three or four day boys were being chased round the cloakroom by a big catherine wheel, which was gambolling about the floor, having escaped from the pin on which it was first ignited.

On Monday morning Watkins brought a brass cannon and some powder with him. This weapon, which had no stand, jumped all over the place, and had to be fired by means of a slow match of touch-paper. Previous to its being discharged every one rushed out of the playground, and waited on the path until after the explosion had taken place. At about the sixth discharge there was a prodigious bang, and when we came

to search for the cannon, it was nowhere to be seen. Whether it had burst, or hopped over the wall into the field, no one could say, but as we were discussing the matter Brewer suddenly poked his head above the boarding.

“Now, then,” he cried roughly, “the master says you’re to stop that row. What do you think you’re doing, I should like to know—celebrating the Queen’s birthday ?”

“Mind your own business,” answered Gale ; “we’re on our own ground.”

“Don’t you know it’s Gunpowder Plot on Wednesday ?” cried Fraser. “Bring your revolver and help to kick up a row.”

Something in this last appeal seemed to rouse Brewer’s anger in an extraordinary manner.

“You mind what you’re talking about,” he shouted. “I haven’t got no revolver. Just stop that row, d’ye hear ?”

As Watkins’s cannon had apparently disappeared from off the face of the earth, there was no possibility of continuing the “row,” and we were forced to comply with our enemy’s demand.

“What a cram !” remarked Fraser. “He has got a revolver.”

“Yes,” answered Gale; “and I wonder why it is, whenever you mention it, he always flies off into a fearful wax?”

The Fifth of November craze still continued to possess our minds, and on returning from the tooth-drawing excursion we found the twins occupied in trying to let off a quantity of “blue light,” which they had been making from a private recipe, and which steadily refused to ignite, and, indeed, when thrown at last into the schoolroom grate nearly put the fire out.

“I say,” remarked Fraser, “I don’t think I shall be at this place for another Fifth, and I wish we could do something special this time—something different from what we’ve ever done before.”

“Why shouldn’t we have a carnival?” said Mobsley.

“What’s that?”

“Why, at home people dress up in all kinds of funny costumes, with masks, and have a procession round the town with a band, and torches, and all that sort of thing.”

“Old Mark would never let us dress up and fool about like that,” said Gale. “We can’t have a carnival.”

“Yes, we can,” answered Fraser, who always burned to try anything fresh—“yes, we can. We’ll have one to-night on the top landing.”

“But it isn’t the Fifth to-day.”

“That doesn’t matter. We’ll have the carnival to-night, and something else to-morrow, and the fireworks on the next day, and that’ll help to spin it out.”

“Romulus” and “Remus” possessed some Christy Minstrel collars and cuffs, and when at home had a peculiar penchant for covering their faces with burnt cork. This was an opportunity not to be lost. They warmly supported the proposition, and accordingly it was decided that we were to have a carnival.

Never before had the top landing witnessed such an extraordinary function. Considering that the materials at our disposal were limited, the costumes in many instances did credit to the inventive faculties of the wearers; and when, after Mr. Soper had gone down to supper, we emerged from our respective bedrooms, there was a general explosion of stifled laughter.

The twins had their faces blacked, and wore the huge red and white collars and cuffs affected by the orthodox negro minstrel. Mobsley had fashioned a costume out of his picture handkerchiefs. The flags of all nations adorned his breast, while the death of Nelson hung down his back. “Gentle Spring” had covered himself with an assortment of neckties, coloured scarves, etc., which, appearing in all kinds of unexpected places, gave him the look of a burst

rag-bag. Gale and Wood had purchased penny masks specially for the occasion ; while Fraser outdid them all with a costume fashioned entirely out of newspapers, which he fastened together with pins over his under-garments. I having nothing of my own wherewith to make myself ridiculous, and being unable to obtain assistance from other people, was forced to content myself with turning my coat inside out, and reddening my nose with cherry tooth-paste. It was thought necessary to have some object in our revels, and for this purpose a "Guy" had been hastily constructed with some old boots, a pair of trousers, a dressing-gown of Mr. Soper's, which we found hanging up in the bath-room, and another mask. Seating this dummy in a chair, we performed a dance round it, and then bore it in solemn state up and down the passage. Bowden and Simpson, being still estranged from us by the recollection of the cod-liver oil and slippering, continued to hold themselves aloof, refusing alike to subscribe to our firework fund and to take part in this celebration.

For some little time we continued these harmless revels ; and all might have gone well had not Fraser, emboldened by success, been led to attempt a daring finale to the entertainment.

“Let’s go into the kitchen and show Hannah,” he cried.

“No fear!” said Gale; “it’s too risky.”

“Oh, it’s all right!” answered the other. “Medlar and Miss Trigg and Soper are at supper. We can pop down and back long before they finish, and it’ll give Hannah a rare old start.”

The Joneses burned to show off their Christy Minstrel collars, and once more voted for the carrying out of Fraser’s proposal. We went; but, alas! it was ourselves, and not Hannah, who got the “rare old start.”

Silently we crept down the stairs. A halt was made on the lower landing to readjust the Guy, whose body was coming to pieces. “Romulus” reconnoitred the hall, and pronounced it all clear, and Fraser gave us our final instructions.

“Dash down the passage and into the kitchen, give old Hannah a war-dance, and then scoot back again for your lives.”

We crossed the hall, and were hurrying down the passage, when an awful thing happened. We heard the click of the dining-room latch! To retreat was impossible. On one side of us was Mr. Medlar’s study, and on the other was a small china pantry. Fraser, who carried the Guy, flung it bodily through the open

door of the pantry, while with one accord we sought shelter in the study, in which, fortunately for us, the light had been extinguished. Never before, I am sure, had the walls of that apartment contained such a motley group of visitors. We huddled together in breathless silence. Mr. Medlar walked slowly along the passage. At length he stopped. Oh, horror! one of the Guy's limp legs was protruding outside of the pantry door. The head-master stooped down and dragged the rest of the figure out into the light, then after a moment's pause called Mr. Soper.

“Mr. Soper, can you explain what this is?”

The “superintendent” adjusted his glasses.

“Dear me!” he exclaimed. “Why, this is my dressing-gown!”

“Well, I presume this isn't your work?”

“Oh no, sir! I think it must be some joke of the boys.”

“When can they have put it there?”

“I'm sure I don't know, sir.”

For a moment or so the two gentlemen remained gazing thoughtfully at the dummy, and in spite of our perilous situation, “Gentle Spring” and “Romulus” began to sink with suppressed laughter. Then Mr. Medlar spoke,—

“ You’d better go up and see if they’re all in their rooms. But first will you come with me into the schoolroom and give me those marks ? ”

The speaker and his companion passed on.

“ Now’s your time ! ” cried Fraser. “ Scoot for your lives ! ”

We went up those stairs, as the old saying goes, “ like a shot out of a shovel.” I remember nothing until we stood panting in our room. Fraser’s paper costume had burst open in all directions. He looked like a bridecake box that has just come through the post.

“ Quick ! ” he cried ; “ into bed before Soper comes ! ”

When the “ superintendent ” arrived, we were all feigning sleep. He paused, however, beside my bed with the candle in his hand.

“ You aren’t asleep, Dean ; and why—what have you been doing to your nose ? ”

“ Please, sir, I’ve got a cold,” I answered feebly ; which, as it happened, was the truth.

“ Yes ; but what have you been putting on your nose ? ”

“ Please, sir, cherry tooth-paste.”

“ Tut ! tut ! ” said Mr. Soper. “ What good d’you think cherry tooth-paste is for a cold ? Go to Miss Trigg in the morning and get some proper medicine.”

It was rather a tame ending to the carnival, but we

thanked our stars for our escape. Mr. Soper wanted to know something about the unauthorized borrowing of his dressing-gown, and the twins, who had jumped into bed with their black faces, and pulled the clothes over their heads, had a private washing bill to settle with Hannah ; but with a little diplomacy these two matters were arranged without the real truth coming to Mr. Medlar's ears, and once more we breathed freely.

All this, as I have already said, was but a prelude to the famous Fifth, for whose fiery festivities we had already prepared by laying in a stock of squibs, crackers, rockets, Roman candles, flower-pots, and other explosives. These had been procured by a general subscription, the only persons who refused to contribute to the fund being Bowden and Simpson, who were still unreconciled with their comrades, and took this as an opportunity of showing their resentment of the slippering business.

“ Very well ! ” snapped Fraser ; “ if you won’t go shares in buying them, you shan’t share in the fun of letting them off. Don’t you two come into the playground to-morrow night, or you’ll get turned out.”

“ We don’t want to see your messing fireworks,” answered Bowden. “ You can keep ‘em, and eat the wretched things, for all we care.”

The narrow escape from a disastrous termination to our carnival made us a little more careful of our behaviour on the fourth. It would never do to get into a scrape at the last moment, and run the risk of having our fireworks confiscated, or the celebration forbidden by Mr. Medlar. The fate of the Fire Brigade was still fresh in our minds, and we accordingly decided to "lie low."

That afternoon Fraser, Mobsley, and I whiled away the time before tea with another private examination of the silver mug, which was a never-failing source of interest and speculation. We once more visited the shrubbery, Fraser taking an old spade with which we dug a fairly deep hole on the opposite side of the buttress, but without bringing to light any other pieces of buried treasure.

How could the tankard have come there? And what was its history? That night, after Wood had departed to the land of dreams, Mobsley retold, in thrilling accents, the story of the dead Royalist, and gave such a graphic description of the spectral figure gliding among the trees, and pointing with its shadowy finger to the spot where the plate lay hidden, that once more my sleep was disturbed by horrible dreams, and I woke up crying, "There he is."

The following day we passed in a fever of excite-

ment, and lost all patience with the sun for not setting directly after dinner. We did our preparation work in the afternoon; and at length, when tea was over, we prepared to commence operations.

“Look here, young Dean,” said Fraser, “we shall want that old spade for letting off the coloured fire on. Just go and fetch it. I left it standing against the wall in the shrubbery.”

I trotted off readily enough down the path, but as I was crossing the garden an uneasy feeling came over me. I walked slower, and finally stopped. I knew very well that the cavalier’s ghost existed only in Mobsley’s fertile brain; but there, in the darkness, the story all came back so vividly to my mind that I was afraid to enter the shrubbery lest I should encounter the spectral owner of the silver mug. It was only for a few seconds that I paused. It would never do to return empty-handed to Fraser, and own to being frightened at nothing; so I took courage, and crept cautiously through a well-known gap in the evergreens. In the dense gloom of the shrubbery it was hardly possible to see a yard in front of you. I advanced towards the wall, feeling for the tree trunks with my outstretched hand, and my feet making no sound on the soft earth. Suddenly my heart gave a jump, and

then stood still. Close beside me something moved, so near that in spite of the darkness I saw its shape and outline as it glided past—a tall, gaunt figure, apparently shrouded in a cloak. In a moment it was lost in the surrounding blackness. Then I heard the unused door softly swing to on its rusty hinges. That was quite enough! I turned and fled.

“Well,” cried Fraser, whom I encountered in the path, the box of fireworks in his arms, “have you found the spade?”

“No,” I gasped. “O Fraser, I’ve seen something! I really believe it was the ghost!”

My companion was too intent upon the business in hand to take much notice of my reply.

“Ghost!—rubbish!” he answered. “Why didn’t you bring the spade, you young fool? Here, hold these; I’ll fetch it.”

He hurried across the garden, and was back again in a few moments.

“Did you see anything?” I faltered.

“See anything? of course not! You’re such a little funk you’d run away from your own shadow. Come on; it’s time we began.”

The box of fireworks was deposited out of harm’s way in a corner of the playground, close to the grave

of Mobsley's mice. Mr. Soper was present, and gave the word to commence ; and after some discussion as to what should be let off first, we decided to begin with the coloured fire. The *green* burnt splendidly, so did a box of *red*. The display promised to be a grand success. Fraser arranged a little mound of *blue light* in the shovel, and was just in the act of applying a match, when a thing happened which nearly startled us all out of our senses. In some unaccountable manner the whole stock of fireworks in the corner took fire, and went off together in a grand explosion. Talk about a set piece ! the Crystal Palace was not in it. Before we knew what was happening, the air was full of crackers, squibs, and bursting "flower-pots." Rockets soared in the air or whizzed past our heads, and Roman candle stars banged against and cannoned off the boarding. We fled back to the garden path for shelter. Mr. Soper stumbled, and "Romulus" and Gale fell over him, while Wood never stopped running until he reached the stable.

For quite a minute the banging and fizzing continued, and the playground seemed full of fire and smoke. Then there came a dreadful, melancholy silence. All our hard-saved pocket-money had been blazed away in that astonishing eruption.

“How could it have happened?”

“A spark must have got amongst them,” said Mr. Soper.

“Not it!” cried Fraser, who was almost sobbing with rage and disappointment. “They were yards away from that coloured fire, and it didn’t give off any sparks. Some one did it on purpose.”

“But no one was anywhere near there.”

“I don’t care; it was done on purpose, I tell you. The beastly things could not have gone off of their own accord.”

We returned to the playground. A lantern which we meant to have used for lighting squibs at was still burning on the iron seat. Fraser caught it up, and hurried away to examine the exploded magazine. The ground was strewn with exploded cases, and a lot of these still remained at the bottom of the blackened soap-box.

Gale carefully picked them out, while Fraser stood by and held the lantern.

“Hullo!” exclaimed the latter suddenly; “what’s that? I say, you fellows, look here!”

As he spoke he held up the charred remains of two fusees.

“That’s what did it!” cried Fraser excitedly. “Some

one struck these things and dropped them over the boarding into the box when we weren't looking. The first one must have missed fire, but the next fell on the end of a squib or something, and that set the whole lot going."

There was a moment's silence, then "Romulus" spoke: "I say, where are Simpson and Bowden?"

The effect of this remark was simply electrical. A general rush was made for the garden path. Mobsley alone lingered for a moment in the playground. He picked up the two burnt fusees which Fraser had dropped, and carefully deposited them in a small tin box containing three pen nibs and a fragment of peppermint.

Then he smiled his "Great Serpent" smile. Anything in the shape of a mystery was meat and drink to Mobsley.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SILVER TANKARD GIVES US TROUBLE.

FRASER, Gale, and the Joneses ran as hard as they could pelt up the garden path, and burst into the schoolroom with a suddenness and violence suggestive of the coming of the fire-brigade. Bowden and Simpson were crouching down in front of the fire, toasting gelatines on the ends of their penholders.

“Look here!” cried Fraser: “what have you been doing?”

“Yes, what have you been doing?” echoed “Romulus” and Gale. The inquiry was made in such a ferocious tone that the supposed culprits both sprang to their feet, and retreated a step or two as though they expected to be knocked down.

“Doing?” answered Bowden, in astonishment; “why, we’ve been roasting gelatines.”

“You’ve been doing something more than that,” panted Fraser: “you’ve let off our fireworks.”

"We haven't touched your rotten fireworks!" retorted Simpson. "You said we weren't to come near the playground."

"See if their boots are muddy!" cried Gale.

All over the garden the ground was soft and muddy. Bowden and Simpson were in their slippers, and these were clean and dry, and bore not the faintest trace of the wet earth. The case was clearly not proven.

"Well, what's up?" said Bowden; "tell us what the bother's all about."

Fraser hastily recounted what had happened. As he finished, the rest of us entered the schoolroom, and gathered in a group round the fireplace.

"It must have been a spark," murmured Wood.

"It *wasn't* a spark, I tell you!" snapped Fraser. "It was those fusees; some one dropped them into the open box from behind the boards at the corner of the shrubbery." He paused; then suddenly recollecting the spade incident, he rounded on me, crying,—

"Look here, young Dean! you said you saw somebody in the shrubbery just before we began. Who was it?"

For a moment I found myself quite an important personage; every one listened eagerly while I stammered out an account of my adventure.

"It must have been that cad of a Brewer," cried "Romulus." "He's the fellow who did it. He's been in a fine rage ever since we cheeked him about firing off that cannon."

"But Brewer's short and thickset," interposed Mobsley, "and young Dean says what he saw was six feet high."

That "what" was suggestive of the ghost, and the very way in which Mobsley uttered the word made me shiver at the recollection of my encounter. Fraser bullied me to say that the figure might have been short instead of tall, but I stuck to my first assertion.

"Well, any way," said Gale, "it must have been Brewer who let off the fireworks. He needn't have been in the shrubbery at the time. The box was in the corner of the playground, and he might have dropped the fusees over the partition from old Greenaway's garden."

This seemed the most probable solution of the mystery. Mr. Medlar, however, who of course had no knowledge of our feud with the manservant, declared that the catastrophe must have been due to our own carelessness, and Miss Trigg expressed a hope that "this would be an end to those nasty firework nights."

"It was Brewer," repeated Fraser, when we reached

the top landing, and prepared to disperse to our different rooms—"it was Brewer. He's always had a spite against us; and some day we'll pay him out."

This sentiment was received with a general murmur of approval, in which even Bowden and Simpson joined; but Mobsley, I noticed, remained silent, and thoughtfully shook his head.

When we had sufficiently recovered from the excitement of this memorable Fifth, we once more concentrated our attention on our museums, and the rage for them increased.

Simpson and Bowden, on the strength of their now possessing "Gentle Spring's" bottled centipede, decided to have a "Natural History" drawer in their cabinet. They exchanged a pocket penholder with one of the day boys for half a dozen dilapidated butterflies, and even suggested digging up the remains of "Reading," "Writing," and "Arithmetic" for the sake of their skeletons. Public sentiment, however, was strongly against such a desecration, and they were forced to abandon the idea.

The Joneses were jealous of the mummy's earring; they wished to have some genuine antiquity to brag about, and at length among their treasures, procured from goodness knows where, appeared the brown bowl

of an ancient clay pipe, which they declared had been found at Pompeii. We were inclined to be sceptical, until Marsden gravely pronounced the relic to be genuine, stating that the old Roman of the period always smoked black shag, and that he (Marsden) recognized the smell of this particular kind of tobacco. Gale and the Joneses triumphed, and from this time forth a keen rivalry was manifested between them and Simpson, Bowden, and Spring, each party being determined to make their collection of curiosities outdo that possessed by their rivals.

It was in carrying out this intention that "Romulus" and "Remus" met with a rather comical experience.

"Look here, Arthur," said the latter: "I'll tell you who would be the man to get curiosities from, and that's old 'Sailor Ben.' He's been all over the world, and is sure to have heaps of rum things that he wouldn't mind parting with for a trifle. If we could get a stuffed flying-fish or a cannibal chief's skull drinking-cup, it'd take the shine out of Spring's glass eye."

"Sailor Ben" was a tough old salt who had retired from the sea years before—with a wooden leg. We fondly believed that he had been maimed by a foeman's round shot when serving with "Midshipman Easy" and other of our naval heroes on board a man-of-war.

Dick Adams, however, had another version of the story, which, sad to relate, we afterwards found to be correct. It affirmed that the missing limb had not been amputated by the light of ship's lanterns in some dark cockpit, while the victim sang "Rule Britannia," but had been forfeited as a result of "Sailor Ben's" having tumbled from the forecastle of a dirty little brig into the bottom of a lighter, when returning from shore leave in a state of intoxication. Since this catastrophe "Sailor Ben" had "played many parts." When fortune smiled on him, he plied the trade of a rag-and-bone merchant, or wheeled about a gaily-painted barrow and sold ices; when, on the other hand, the tide ebbed in his affairs, he either disturbed the peace and was sent to jail, or remained sober and swept a crossing.

At the time of which I write he was to be seen every day pursuing the last-named vocation, at the corner of a street not ten minutes' walk from Hanover House.

"Romulus" approved of his brother's suggestion, and together they started off to interview the ancient mariner.

"I say, Ben, have you got any curiosities to sell?"

"Sailor Ben" chewed his quid for twenty seconds without speaking, and then said, "Wot d'ye mean by kooriosities?"

“Why, something funny that you got on one of your voyages when you were a sailor.”

The old man leaned his chin on his broom-handle, and pondered deeply ; his memory had evidently carried him far away into some distant land, and the brilliant sunshine, bright colours, and fragrant scents of the tropics had probably replaced the muddy street and dull November fog. At length he spoke,—

“’Ow much’ll ye give me fer this ’ere wooden leg ?”

“Oh, shut up !” answered “Romulus,” laughing. “Have you got anything strange that’ll do for us to put in our museum ? If so, we’ll buy it—that is, if it doesn’t cost more than sixpence.”

“Sailor Ben” continued to lean on his broom-handle, and stare vacantly at the top button of “Romulus’s” waistcoat. At length, after about two minutes’ cogitation, he began to speak in a slow, solemn manner.

“Did I ever tell you about that message from the sea when we picked up them five poor fellers in a boat ? No ? Well, then, jus’ listen. It was on the old *Jane Sandys*, and we was a-comin’ ’ome from—why, it must have been from Buenos Ayres. Yes, that was it—the very same trip that the second mate had a marlin’-spike drop on his head, and went queer, and jumped overboard. By Jimmy ! that was a rum thing,

too. But let's see—wot was I a-speakin' of? Oh, I know—this 'ere message from the sea. We must have been about a week out from Buenos Ayres, when one night I was standin' lookout forrad, and all on a suddent I seen a bottle bobbin' about in the moonlight on the top of the water. It was almost a flat ca'm—we was only just movin' very slowly—and when I hailed the mate and told him what it was, he had the helm put over jes' a little bit, and we fished this bottle up in a bucket. The cork was all sealed up, and tied down with a bit of canvas over it, and we could see there was a scrap of paper inside. The mate says, 'I'll take and show this to the old man,' says he. 'This 'ere's a message from the sea, I reckon.' Well, now, it was lucky I seen that bottle; for when the cap'en read the letter, it was to say that an American barque, the *Ocean Queen* of Charlestown, had burnt three days before, and the crew was takin' to the boats. It gave the latitood and longitood, and we stood out of our course to see if we could find them; and next mornin', sure enough, we did pick up one of her boats with five poor fellows, and, my word, they'd been drawin' lots, and was jes' a-goin' to start eatin' one another."

The Joneses listened open-mouthed to this harrowing story.

“ Well ? ” they queried.

“ Well,” continued the narrator, “ ‘ Ben,’ says the cap’ en, ‘ I expec’s the Royal Humane Society’ll reward you for this day’s work ; but as you was the man that seen the bottle, you’d best keep it, and it’ll be a thing to hand down to your children’s children.’ ”

“ Sailor Ben ” paused and scratched his stubbly chin with the end of his broom-handle. “ I ain’t got no children,” he continued mournfully, “ so what’s the good of my keepin’ it ? There’s no one’ll care to have it when I’m dead and gone.”

“ Have you got it still ? ” cried “ Romulus ” eagerly—“ the very same bottle ? I say, do sell it to us for our museum.”

“ Well, ’tisn’t that I want to sell it,” answered the man, “ but I should like you young gentlemen to have it, and then, when you’re grown-up men with children of your own, you can tell them of old ‘ Sailor Ben,’ and how he saved the lives of them five poor men. Come again this time to-morrow, and I’ll have it with me.”

“ Romulus ” and “ Remus ” came home in triumph, and for the rest of that day there was no living with them. The story of “ Sailor Ben’s ” message from the sea was dinned into our ears during every spare moment, and Gale joined his partners in crowing over

the owners of the rival museum, for it could not be denied that the possession of this historic bottle would place the Jones's collection at the top of the tree.

“Yah, Bowden! how much d'you want now for your lucky-packet earring?” cried “Romulus.”

“Go and wash your face with your soap apple,” was the crushing rejoinder.

These bitter remarks led to further exhibitions of jealousy and discord; and when Mr. Soper came into the schoolroom to take evening preparation, the proprietors of the two museums were bombarding each other with their lesson-books. Even “Gentle Spring's” placid spirit was so far roused by having his Indian god spoken of as a “dirty little doll,” and his glass eye pronounced “not worth a button,” that he laid hands on “Remus,” who had made these assertions, and chastised him with a rolled-up map of the Holy Land.

On the following day, as soon as dinner was over, the twins started off to secure their prize. “Sailor Ben” was at his crossing, and in exchange for their sixpence drew from his pocket something carefully wrapped up in newspaper. The boys clutched it eagerly, but when the outer covering was removed and disclosed an ordinary ginger-beer bottle, their faces fell a little.

“Is *this* it?” they asked.

“That’s it—the very identical one,” was the answer.

The new owners of the treasure still hesitated. There seemed something incongruous in a *ginger-beer* bottle saving the lives of five men—it was like a coster’s cart leading a circus procession; a wine bottle, at least, should have been entrusted with the mission. This feeling of disappointment lasted only for a moment.

“There!” said “Sailor Ben” impressively. “You ought to keep that as long as ever you live. It’s the remarkablest thing I ever had; and you might sail round the world fifty times and never find its equal. ‘Ben,’ says the cap’en, ‘you’re the man as seen it, and you’d best keep it; and,’ says he, ‘it’ll be a thing to hand down to your children’s children.’”

The Joneses literally danced back to the schoolroom, and we crowded round to view their treasure.

“There!” cried “Romulus;” “that very bottle was thrown off a burning ship, the *Ocean Queen* of Charlestown, and it floated over miles of sea, and was the means of saving the lives of five men, who were starving in a boat and just going to eat each other; *that very bottle did*, and—what d’you say?”

“Look here, Arthur Jones,” interposed Mobsley

quietly. "What d'you want to try and stuff all that rubbish into us for, about *Ocean Queens* and shipwrecked sailors? It's all bosh. Just look at this!"

We looked. There, on the bottom of the bottle, were stamped the name and address of a local soda-water maker, whose manufactory was not five minutes' walk from where we were then standing—T. Brown and Sons, Stockingham. There was a moment's silence, followed by a roar of laughter. Bowden and Simpson literally howled with delight. "Sailor Ben's" "message from the sea" had all been made up for the sake of earning sixpence, and the whole thing was a heartless swindle.

When the storm of laughter, jibes, and cat-calls which this discovery gave rise to had died down a little, we discovered the following dialogue was taking place between the discomfited owners of the bottle:—

"You did!"—"I didn't!"—"I tell you it was your fault!"—"It wasn't; you bought it!"—"I didn't!"—"Oh, what a cram!"—"I'll smack your head, John!"—"No, you won't, Arthur!"—"Well, say you did!"—"No, I did—"—"Yah! there, you say you did!"—"Shut up!"—"Shut up!"

At this point the dispute would probably have ended in a scuffle had not "Gentle Spring" stepped in be-

tween the brothers and commenced to arbitrate by arming himself with the ginger-beer bottle, and threatening to use it as a club ; and so the matter ended.

This spirit of rivalry between the owners of the two leading museums did not affect Fraser, Mobsley, and myself ; we were quite content with the secret assurance that our silver tankard was worth more than all the other collections put together. At times when the others bragged of their various treasures, we felt a burning desire to astonish them with an exhibition of our find. Mobsley, however, urged us not to do so, declaring that as soon as the facts of the case were known our treasure would be forfeited to the Crown, and this we thought very unfair. The Queen had no doubt plenty of silver mugs in her castle at Windsor, and one more or less would make no difference.

Unfortunately, in spite of our efforts to keep this prudent resolve, the cat was let out of the bag, and as ill-luck would have it, a knowledge of our possession was gained by the very person from whom we were most anxious to keep it a secret.

We had gone up to bed one evening, and were standing round the dressing-table, watching Mobsley heating the end of a knitting-needle in the candle, preparatory to boring a hole in a bit of cocoanut-shell which he had

carved into a heart. So intent were we on this proceeding that we did not hear any one enter the room, and it was not until the newcomer spoke that we were aware of his presence.

“Hullo! what have you chaps got here?” We turned round with a start. Bowden had strolled in to return a clothes-brush, and was standing looking down into Fraser’s play-box, which contained our museum, and the lid of which had been carelessly left open. There, on the top of everything else, lay the silver tankard.

“What’s this?” repeated the newcomer, stooping down and picking up the mug. “I say, it’s jolly fine; where did you get it?”

Fraser darted forward and snatched it away. “Leave it alone,” he said; “it isn’t yours.”

“You needn’t get in a wax,” returned the other. “I only asked where you got it. Why didn’t you show it us before?”

“Tisn’t mine; it belongs to all three of us.”

“Well, where did it come from? can’t you tell a fellow?”

“No,” answered Fraser shortly. “Look sharp and clear out; here’s Soper coming.”

Bowden beat a retreat, but on gaining the passage

he turned on his heel and stuck his head inside the door.

“I say,” he remarked, “sell it me for our museum. What’ll you take for it?”

“Nothing,” answered Fraser, and the door closed.

No further remark was made on the subject until Wood’s heavy breathing told that he was asleep.

“Bother it all!” muttered Fraser. “How could I have been such an ass as to leave my box open? Wood must have seen it too.”

“Oh, he didn’t notice,” answered Mobsley. “It’s Bowden I’m troubling about. He’s bound to try and worm out the truth, and get us into some trouble.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE “MOHICANS” ON THE WAR-PATH.

THE term ran on until it came to the end of the first week in December, and we had begun to blacken out the days on the almanacs fixed up on the inside of our desk lids. The month-old firework disaster was wellnigh forgotten; the memory of Simpson’s and Bowden’s refusal to contribute to the Fifth of November fund, and of their base desertion at the battle of Carlsham Park, was likewise passing out of our minds; and the two cronies had been once more received back into the society of their comrades.

The museum rage still continued, and Bowden had twice questioned us about the tankard.

“You might let’s see that mug again,” he said.
“Whose is the crest engraved on the front?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, where did you get the thing? Did you bring it from home?”

"No," answered Fraser shortly. "I shan't say how we got it. It belongs to us three, and that's all I'm going to tell you."

Two days later Bowden again referred to the subject.

"I say, Simpey and I'll buy that mug of yours for our museum; we will give you a couple of shillings for it."

"A couple of shillings!" answered Mobsley scornfully; "I should think you would."

"Well, it's a good enough price for an old pewter pot like that!"

"Pewter!" retorted Mobsley unguardedly; "it's solid silver!"

"Silver!" cried Bowden. He stared at us, and whistled.

"Bother it!" growled "Chingachgook" a moment later. "I wish I hadn't told him. What a fool I am!"

The museum rage, I repeat, still continued, but it did not satisfy the more active inclinations of Fraser; he pined still for some form of outdoor sport, and suggested that we should play hockey. The weather set in wet, and for four days we were confined to the schoolroom. Every one's temper suffered in consequence. The Joneses quarrelled continuously for

forty-eight hours, with only short intervals for eating, sleeping, and work, and fought seven times during the course of one single afternoon. At length, when the rain ceased, and a washed-out, wintry sun made its appearance, we were ready for any outdoor amusement, even "brigands," and so readily agreed to carry out Fraser's latest proposal.

Hockey was not then the scientific game which it has become of recent years; at that distant period I remember it as something between a riot and a massacre; but this may be owing to the fact that I was only a small boy, and not very hardy. We provided ourselves with sticks and a small india-rubber ball, marked out goals on the playground boards, and picked up sides. It was Saturday afternoon, and looking back with the calmer judgment of maturer years, it seems remarkable that any of us should have lived to see the dawn of another Sunday. Boxed up in that small playground, there was really no chance of escape. The main object in view was to hit *something*, though apparently it mattered little whether that something was the solid earth or your neighbour's nose. The gravel flew like grape-shot; the hard ball banged against the boarding with a force that seemed sufficient to split the planks; while the fate of any one

who fell in the thick of a scrimmage was worse to contemplate than that of a rider who goes down in front of a cavalry charge.

Spring, Fraser, Mobsley, "Remus," and I took off the other five. "Gentle Spring" played back; he was armed with a big branch which he had clandestinely borrowed from a tree in the shrubbery, and which reminded one of the roughly-shaped clubs affected by giants in illustrations to "The Pilgrim's Progress." One sweep of this weapon sent the ball whizzing through the air like a small cannon-shot, and whoever got in its way promptly bit the dust. With serene good temper Spring laid about friend and foe alike. Standing anywhere in front of him one never felt safe; and at length, when he prepared to strike, the more prudent players sought to hide behind the posts of the swing.

In speaking thus of the game, I am, perhaps, giving the somewhat prejudiced impression which it created on the mind of a rather faint-hearted youngster. Fraser enjoyed it immensely, and so did Gale, and the faces of the Joneses were radiant with satisfaction and delight. At length, just after half-time, the game was brought to an abrupt termination by "Gentle Spring" slogging the ball clean over the partition into old Greenaway's garden.

We might have been tempted to go after it, but Brewer was standing just outside the kitchen door.

Fraser and Gale climbed to the top of the boards and hailed him. "Hi, Mr. Brewer! you might chuck us the ball that's just come over."

The man strolled across the beds, picked up the ball, and calmly put it in his pocket.

"Look 'ere," he said: "we've had enough trouble with balls comin' over into this 'ere garden, and it's got to be stopped. D'you think I'm paid to come and hunt about for your playthings? It's got to be stopped, I tell you."

With this he turned and walked away. In vain we entreated him to return the ball, and then booed and called him names; he entered the kitchen, and shut the door behind him with a bang. Unfortunately, the matter did not end here; at tea Mr. Medlar announced that he had received another complaint from Mr. Green-away of our sending balls over into his garden.

"What have you been doing this afternoon?" he asked.

"Playing hockey, sir."

"Well, don't do so again. You must find some way of amusing yourselves which will not prove a source of annoyance to your neighbours."

"I'm sick of this place!" said Fraser. "Why can't we have proper games, and a field to play in?"

One source of consolation existed at this depressing era to raise our drooping spirits. Tommy Bray and other members of the "Hevening Star" football club were employed in a builder's yard situated just beyond the corner of the Carlsham Road.

They had never forgotten the (from their point of view) unsatisfactory termination of the encounter in the park; and of late they seemed determined to make war upon Hanover House in general, and seized every opportunity for open hostilities. In the dinner hour they waylaid belated day boys, who were forced either to run for it, or defend themselves with their satchels—which, by-the-bye, formed very effective weapons when swung at the end of long straps and properly charged with books. The boarders, on the other hand, never went into town singly without expecting an attack; indeed, on one occasion, when out for a formal walk, the wild hordes of the enemy, headed by the ferocious Bray, suddenly charged into our ranks as we passed the yard, and rolled Wood into the gutter, under the very nose of the astonished Mr. Soper.

This state of affairs, it may be imagined, kept us in

a state of agreeable excitement, and gave rise to the incident which I am now about to describe.

It was Wednesday afternoon, the twelfth of December; the last allowance but one of pocket-money had been given out, and Fraser and I got leave to run down into the town and buy some chestnuts. We turned out of the Carlsham Road into what I believe was then called Pearson Street, at the end of which were several shops. We strolled along in silence. My companion had come to grief in his morning's work, and had two French exercises to write, and we were generally down in the dumps. Suddenly *clatter! bang!* a big stone rattled past us on the pavement, struck a lamp-post, and glanced across the road. We turned our heads, and about thirty yards behind beheld the well-known figure of Tommy Bray. He had seen us from the yard, and had slipped out to give us a passing salute.

In a moment the careworn expression had vanished from Fraser's face; his close-cropped hair seemed to bristle with excitement, and the light of battle kindled in his eye.

"What's that for?" he cried.

"You!" shouted the other, letting fly with another pebble. Fraser returned the enemy's fire with such

accuracy, that if the latter had not skipped aside he would certainly have been "winged." It was a shot worthy of the redoubtable "Hawk-eye," and evidently made an impression on the mind of Tommy Bray; for he did not reply to it, but contented himself with following slowly after us, and passing uncomplimentary remarks on our characters and appearance. I knew I was not what a cold world calls handsome, but to have it announced to the general public that my head resembled a "Dutch cheese on a saucer" was, I thought, exaggerated and uncalled for. The "saucer" was, I knew, a reference to my turn-down collar, but the "Dutch cheese" I could not accept. Fraser so far resented the statement that "his father turned the handle of a washing-mangle," that he wished to turn again and give battle. War, however, was not in my line. I had no particular relish for being knocked down and walked about on, and so begged my comrade to pay no attention to the foeman's coarse taunts. We turned a corner and reached the shops. Bray, I suppose, was obliged to return to his work, but at the same time wished to give us a parting reminder.

"Look out!" cried Fraser, as another stone the size of my fist came bounding along the road. The missile struck the corner of a drain, hopped into the air, and

passed with a crash through a draper's window in front of which we were standing.

The street was empty. Bray was out of sight like a shot; a sudden panic seized us, and we turned to run. Before, however, we had gone more than a dozen paces, a man dashed out of the shop, and seized us both, crying, "Yes, you thought you'd get away, did you? Just you come back with me!"

In a moment we realized the serious nature of the situation. No bystander had been present to witness that we had not committed the deed, and it was in vain that we attempted to proclaim our innocence.

"Oh yes!" sneered the man, as he dragged us inside the shop: "if you didn't do it, what did you want to run away for?—Jones, go and fetch Mr. Galloway."

The grinning errand-boy went off to find the proprietor of the establishment.

"I tell you we didn't do it," protested Fraser. "It was another boy—a chap called—Hooray! Good old Dick!"

I turned to ascertain the reason of this joyful exclamation, and as I did so the glass door of the shop was pushed open, and the reluctant and struggling form of Tommy Bray was thrust into our midst by no less a person than our old friend Dick Adams.

The latter was greatly elated at his capture, and for the time being all gloom and depression had vanished from his face.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed facetiously; "quite a merry little party! Have you got twopennyworth of strap-end anywhere handy, mister? This is the one who smashed your window. I was coming along behind, and seen him chuckin' stones at these young gen'lemen."

At this point the draper himself made his appearance, and the performance began. Tommy Bray lied, wept, and swore alternately. Mr. Galloway boxed his ears, the assistant prodded him with a yard measure, and Dick Adams punched him all over with great gusto. Mr. Bray, senior, who was also employed at the builder's yard, was sent for, and promised to administer to his son and heir a thrashing which the latter "wouldn't ferget in a 'urry;" and we retired very well satisfied with this termination to our adventure.

We bought our chestnuts, and gave some to Dick.

"It was awfully good of you to collar that fellow!" said Fraser. "What are you doing now? When are you coming back to old Greenaway's, instead of that beast of a Brewer?"

"Oh, never!" answered the man; "I'm going away to-morrow to a job I've been offered at Yosbury."

"Shan't we see you again?"

"No, I don't suppose so. Remember me to Master Gale and the other young gen'lemen. Good-bye, sir."

Fraser went back fuming with rage. "Old Dick's always been our friend," he cried, after giving a detailed account of the Tommy Bray incident to the group gathered round the schoolroom fire, "and it's a jolly shame that he should have been turned out of his place by that wretched cad of a Brewer. Dick never kicked up a fuss when we made a row or knocked balls over into the garden; but this fellow's done everything he could to spite us ever since he's been there. He stopped our cricket, and sneaked when those boards went over, and got old Greenaway to complain about our playing hockey; and I'm certain it was he who dropped those fusees into our fireworks."

There was an angry murmur among the audience; then "Romulus" and "Remus," with their usual readiness for prompt action, exclaimed with one voice, "Let's pay him out."

"Yes," echoed Gale—"we've stood it long enough; now let's pay him out!"

Every one was of the same opinion. It was high

time we made some retaliation. Too long had we tamely submitted to Brewer's tyranny; he must be "paid out."

"Yes; but how?" murmured Mobsley, whose face was once more bound round with "Ten Little Nigger Boys."

How? There was no lack of ideas on the subject; every one sought to display his zeal by making a suggestion wilder and more preposterous than that of his neighbour.

"Let's hire some man to thrash him," said Bowden.

"Let's tie him to a tree and throw knives at him," suggested Gale, who had recently borrowed the "Mohicans" from Mobsley.

"Remus" proposed breaking the kitchen window; while "Romulus," who was in favour of no half-measures, saw no reason why we should not enlist Dick Adams and "Sailor Ben" into the service, and, headed by these worthies, make a raid on Ashgrove, tar and feather its occupants, and lay waste the garden. Simpson was about to cap the last suggestion with some still more extravagant proposal, when the tea-bell brought this council of war to a conclusion.

After the meal was over, Mobsley and I were loitering about in the passage, when Fraser approached with

a resolute expression on his face, and drew us into a corner.

"It's all rot!" he began. "Those fellows say a lot about what they'll do to that beast Brewer, but it all ends in talk. I mean to *do* something; I'll pay him out. If it hadn't been for him, we might have had cricket, and hockey, and fireworks, and heaps of things, and Dick Adams wouldn't be kicking about the streets wanting work. He's scored off us all round."

"Shall the red Huron boast of this when the deep snows come?" inquired the "Serpent."

"No, Chingachgook," answered Fraser; "thou and I and the lad Uncas will take tea with the accursed Mingo, and make hay in his wigwam." (Fraser could never quote as accurately as Mobsley, but he did his best.)

"When?"

"Now, at once—to-night. Will you fellows help me? it's no use asking the others."

We were fired with our comrade's enthusiasm. This was to be no mere practical joke, but a chivalrous crusade for the setting right of unnumbered wrongs. The "Mohicans," father and son, swore to stand by the intrepid "Hawk-eye," and assist him to the utmost of their power, however perilous might be the undertaking.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I dunno," answered Fraser. "I shall get over into the garden, and see if he's in the kitchen; and if he isn't, I think I shall go inside, and—and smash something!"

Mobsley was thoughtfully stroking his bandaged face.

"I'll tell you what," he said. "I've got some liquid stuff for mending broken china and all that sort of thing; you might rub it on the chairs, and then he'll stick to them."

The proposal was feeble enough; at any other time we ourselves might have laughed at it, but now the business in hand was of too serious a nature for the suggestion to appear in any way amusing or absurd. Fraser thought for a moment.

"We couldn't put down upturned drawing-pins as well, could we?" he asked.

"No; he'd get up again before he was stuck."

"Then we'll put the cement only. Slip out as soon as ever 'prep's' over, and we'll meet by the stable."

I did very little work that evening, but sat staring at the Latin vocabulary in front of me, repeating over and over again, "*Lapis, lapidis*, a stone," without having the slightest notion of what I was doing. The very first sentence in the French exercise was, "Has

your father seen the chair of the (male) gardener?" I started and turned colour: the very lesson-books seemed to have a knowledge of our plot.

At length Mr. Soper gave the signal for giving over work, and in the momentary confusion, while the others were talking and putting away their books, Fraser and Mobsley slipped from the room unnoticed, and I followed.

"Have you got the cement?" asked Fraser, as we hurried down the garden path, stumbling against one another in the darkness. "Come on, then; we shall be back in time for supper. If the coast isn't clear, we'll do it to-morrow night."

My heart thumped against my ribs. Just then putting glue on a kitchen chair seemed a black and terrible crime, and I felt as though we were about to commit a murder. I was half inclined to suggest that two would be sufficient for the deed, and that I would wait in the playground and keep *cave*. But it was impossible for *Le Cerf Agile* to desert "Hawk-eye" and the "Serpent;" the very thought was infamous, and I banished it from my mind, though my lips were dry and parched, and my teeth chattered.

"Now then," murmured Fraser, as we halted in front of the playground boards. "I'll hoist you fellows up,

and then you can give me a pull. We can get back easily enough, because of the cross-bars on the other side. Don't make a row."

We scaled the partition. There was a light in the kitchen, the blind was up, and even at that distance we could see in through the window.

"He's not there," softly whispered the "Scout." "Come on. Keep off the beds, or he'll find the footmarks."

With bated breath we crept along the path. There was a little flagged yard outside the kitchen, and on reaching this, suddenly a chain rattled, and something bounded up against me, frightening me out of my wits and nearly knocking me down. It was old Green-away's dog, Dingo.

The animal knew us well. We used to decoy him into the schoolroom and give him cake, but since Brewer's arrival he had been kept constantly chained up. He continued to caper about, whining and fawning upon us; and Mobsley, whose love for living things was always the ruling passion, lingered behind.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to let him loose; it's a great shame keeping him always fastened up like this." The chain fell on the stones with a clank, and Dingo bounded wildly

round and round the yard. Fraser peeped through a corner of the window.

"There's no one in," he said. "Quick! let's have that stuff." There was a momentary pause. Fraser took the cement, and cautiously pushed open the door. Then suddenly, and without warning, the whole affair was taken entirely out of our hands. It was the dog Dingo who now proceeded to conduct the raid, and his manner of doing so was as follows:—

As Fraser stepped across the threshold, the dog brushed past his legs. Brewer had introduced a cat into old Greenaway's establishment, and the animal was sitting warming itself in front of the kitchen fire. In an instant Dingo spotted it, and a wild performance began.

If the reader has a sufficiently strong imagination to picture to himself the sack of Rome, the storming of Badajoz, and a fox-hunt in a china shop, and by a further mental effort can combine the chief features in these scenes, and think of them as all taking place at once in a room of not more than twelve feet square—if he can do this, he may be able to form some notion of the tragedy which it was now our unhappy lot to witness.

Dingo simply went for the cat, which, spitting and

swearing, jumped on to the table. The dog followed ; the cat sprang across to the dresser. Dingo was after it like a shot ; plates, dishes, cups and saucers were swept to the ground and smashed to atoms. Merrily the chase was continued along a neighbouring shelf ; two jugs and a big basin came to the ground with a hideous crash, and we stood rooted to the spot with amazement and horror. Back across the table and into the window-ledge they went, scattering flower-pots in all directions ; then once more in full cry round the room, and back to the dresser.

"Dingo ! Dingo !" shouted Fraser. "Come here ! Lie down, you beggar !"

The dog paid not the slightest attention, but at that moment the cat took a flying leap on to the mantel-shelf, and, knocking the clock down into the fender, remained crouching in the vacant space, growling horrible oaths, and glaring down at us like a demon. The noise had been sufficient to arouse the whole neighbourhood, and now Dingo pranced about the floor, and commenced barking madly.

Mobsley may have been a duffer in some things, but in any situation like the present he always seemed to find his wits. He tore the handkerchief from his face, twisted it round the dog's neck, and hauled him by

main force out of the kitchen. Fraser slammed the door, and we all bolted. Not a second too soon, for at that moment we heard Brewer thumping down the back stairs, using worse language than the cat.

We were over the boards in a trice, and paused in the playground for a moment to listen.

"Come on," panted "Chingachgook," "or our scalps will be drying in the wind ag'in this hour to-morrow."

We heard the kitchen door open, and Brewer's voice broke the silence with a torrent of threats and execrations. Then we hesitated no longer, but ran like hares.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOTAL DEFEAT OF TOMMY BRAY.

“ **I**T was Dingo’s fault,” said Fraser. “ I told the silly ass to stop it, and he wouldn’t.”

“ You must have made a fine mess of old Greenaway’s kitchen,” remarked “ Romulus.” “ My eye, if he finds out who did it, there’ll be a fearful row !”

It was Thursday morning: the day boys had not yet arrived, and we stood with Gale and the Joneses in a quiet corner of the stable, discussing the previous night’s adventure. The catastrophe had been so terrible that we felt forced to ease our minds by telling the story to somebody.

“ I don’t think he’ll find it out,” said Mobsley doubtfully. “ He’ll think it was the cat. It must have been still squatting on the mantelshelf when Brewer came into the room. He’d have seen that it had bowled over the clock, and so he’d know it had knocked down the other things.”

"Oh yes," answered "Romulus" and "Remus;" "he'd see it was Dingo and the cat, and he'd never imagine that any one else had a hand in the business."

Gale and the Joneses were inclined to take a cheerful view of the matter; the fact was that the first mentioned had that morning received by post a gift for their museum, which in interest surpassed any exhibit contained in either of the rival collections. This was a Moorish dagger—a big, evil-looking weapon, with what Gale called a little "pup" knife stuck into the sheath by its side. Every one was wildly interested in this curiosity, and speculated as to how many people it had killed, and whether the smaller knife was meant for shaving or for cutting up food. The owners, therefore, were in a very complacent frame of mind, and inclined to take a rose-coloured view of things in general, including the possible consequences of our recent escapade. The chief actors, however, who had witnessed the terrible havoc wrought by Dingo when he stormed the dresser, could not so easily rid themselves of their fears of detection.

Fraser was glum and silent; Mobsley tried to appear unconcerned; and as for myself, whenever I heard the front gate squeak or the door bell ring, I trembled, feeling sure that it must be Brewer or his master come

to bring us to judgment. The morning passed, however, without any calamity, and as the day advanced we had another cause for anxiety to occupy our minds.

As I have already said, the arrival of Gale's Moorish dagger caused fresh excitement in the "Museum" world. With this latest addition the Joneses' collection might claim to eclipse all others. Simpson and Bowden pretended not to care, but secretly they were mad with jealousy ; and being determined that theirs should still be the premier museum, they took counsel together as to what should be done in order that they might, if possible, outdo their rivals.

Afternoon school was over ; Fraser, Mobsley, and I had strolled out into the playground, and were congratulating each other on not having heard, as yet, any news from next door, when Bowden came sauntering up to where we stood.

"What'll you take for that old mug of yours ?" he began abruptly, thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets and jingling some money.

"We're not going to sell it," answered Fraser.

"Why not ? We want it for our museum, and it's no good to you ; you haven't got any collection, unless you think that rotten star-fish that's all falling to pieces is worth anything."

“It’s worth as much as that lucky-packet earring of yours and those fusty old butterflies,” answered Fraser. “But I’ve told you about a dozen times already that we aren’t going to sell that cup, and so you needn’t bother about it any more.”

Bowden hesitated; he had evidently set his heart on possessing the cup as a sort of counter-stroke to this latest acquisition of the Joneses.

“Why are you so gone on it?” he inquired. “And why won’t you show it to any one? Are you afraid of having it cribbed?”

“No.”

“Well, how did you get it? Did you bring it from home? Why won’t you tell a chap? It seems a rum thing to bring a silver mug to school with you.”

“I tell you it belongs to us three,” answered Fraser. “It’s no business of yours how we got it, and I’m not going to tell you.”

“Humph! you stole it, I should think,” answered Bowden pettishly, turning on his heel as he spoke.

It was an unwise remark. Fraser had a pebble in his hand, and he threw it after the retreating figure, crying, “That’s a cram! we didn’t.”

The missile struck Bowden on the funny-bone, and he fairly danced with pain and anger.

“Oh, you cad!” he cried. “You’re just as bad as Bray and his lot, chucking stones at a fellow like that. I don’t want your beastly mug; but I’ll be even with you some day.”

“Bother it all!” ejaculated Mobsley, as the speaker disappeared up the path. “I wish he’d never seen that cup. I vote we sell it, and divide the money.”

Each day now seemed fraught with fresh interests and surprises. On Friday morning, when we got up, the ground was covered with a deep snow. As one grows older, one gets somehow to regard snow as rather a nuisance, but in those days the first fall of the season always caused great excitement. We rushed out and joyously flung it into each other’s ears, and stuffed it down our neighbours’ backs. “Romulus” and “Remus” attempted to roll each other. We missed them for a moment, and then from the middle of a big drift we heard the familiar dialogue, “Shut up, John!”—“Stop it, Arthur!” etc., etc.; whereupon a rescue party dragged them out damp but defiant.

Gale took a snowball into morning school, with the intention, I imagine, of putting it on the fire; but this design was frustrated by the keen eye of Mr. Medlar. Gale was stood out for talking. Five minutes later he appealed to the head-master,—

“Please, sir, may I go out?”

“Certainly not!” was the answer; “you’ve only just come in.”

Another five minutes went by, and then—

“Please, sir, mayn’t I go out now?”

“No, sir!” shouted Mr. Medlar. “If you ask me that again, I’ll give you a punishment.”

I sat at the end of the form. Gale held his book up to hide his face, and turned to me with a pitiful expression.

“I say,” he whispered, “*that beastly snowball’s melting in my pocket!*”

Melt it certainly did. At interval there was a bit left about the size of a walnut, and one side of Gale felt as if he had been lying in the gutter.

But these occurrences are hardly worth mentioning when compared with the great event of the day, which was also in a measure brought about by the presence of the snow.

I have already described the hostile attitude which had been assumed towards us by Tommy Bray and his followers. On this particular Friday morning there had been a sharp though indecisive skirmish in Pearson Street, both sides claiming the victory. After dinner the boys took the precaution of meeting for mutual

support before reaching the enemy's territory ; and under the leadership of Marsden, they charged triumphantly down the street, driving the enemy before them, and capturing two caps, which in this kind of warfare was to be regarded as the equivalent of taking a stand of colours. The victors, flushed and exultant, swarmed into the schoolroom, highly delighted with the result of the engagement ; and the boarders gathered round to applaud their prowess. Our triumph, however, was but short-lived.

“ Hallo ! what’s that ? ” cried Fraser. “ Listen ! ”

A hoarse yell came from the road outside ; the next instant two boys rushed into the room, and as they did so a huge snowball whizzed through the open door, and passing just over my head, struck full in the centre of the blackboard, burst like a small bombshell, and scattered fragments in all directions.

This was startling enough, but the appearance presented by our unfortunate comrades was calculated to cause us still greater dismay. Returning from dinner after the rest, they had evidently been set on by superior numbers. Cole, who had been caught and rolled, was snow all over ; his hat was gone, his collar hung down loose, and one pocket of his coat was torn open. Slade, on the other hand, had suffered in a different

manner: his cheek was covered with blood, which flowed freely from a nasty cut under his eye.

“Great Scott!” cried Marsden. “What have you been doing?”

“They rushed out on us unexpectedly as we passed the yard,” panted Cole.

“Yes,” added Slade, “and the cads have been putting stones in their snowballs; that’s what cut my face.”

“Remus” stooped down and picked something off the floor.

“Here’s another,” he said; “it must have been in the one they’ve just thrown.”

A second missile struck the schoolroom door, and was followed by a chorus of groans and jeers. The enemy were not obliged to return to their work before two o’clock, and they were still congregated in the road, probably in the hope of intercepting the last of our stragglers.

“I say,” cried Marsden, springing to his feet, “we won’t let them treat us like that! Come on, we’ll all rush out together and charge the beggars; but, first of all, get some ammunition.”

Everybody, even Wood and Simpson, was ready to respond to this appeal. We hurried out into the yard,

and each man quickly prepared an armful of good hard snowballs. Marsden headed the host.

“Are you ready?” he asked, pausing with his hand on the schoolroom door. “Then come on!”

It was a splendid rush. With a whoop we swept out into the road, and the Brayites, who did not anticipate such a sudden onslaught, were for the moment inclined to retreat. Thomas alone stood his ground. He flung another of his stoned snowballs with all his might at Fraser’s head, but fortunately the missile went wide. The next moment the thrower was half blinded by our discharge, and while in this condition Marsden upset him into a snow-drift.

Before he could rise, “Gentle Spring” calmly sat down on his prostrate body, and seizing his wrists in a grip of iron, mildly requested him to lie still.

But the battle was not yet over. So far from being dismayed by the sight of their leader’s fate, the enemy seemed fired with a resolve to effect a rescue. About twenty yards down the road they re-formed, hastily gathered up fresh ammunition, and slowly advanced to renew the conflict. Like the British tars at Trafalgar, we waited, reserving our fire until they should come well within range. The foemen shouted and jeered, and a random shot caught “Remus” a tremendous

whack on the side of the head. But still we made no reply. The Brayites increased their pace to a run.

“Now let fly!” shouted Marsden; “give it ‘em hot!”

As he spoke the words, the gate of Ashgrove was flung open, and old Greenaway, who had probably been disturbed by our battle-cries, rushed out into the open space between the opposing hosts, brandishing a walking-stick, and crying,—

“Be off, you rascals! be off, or I’ll have you sent to jail!”

It was a rash act. The speaker had hardly time to finish the sentence when we exchanged a volley with the enemy. Old Greenaway stood exactly in the line of fire: his huge felt hat was knocked off his head, another missile struck him on the nose, and four or five more left white patches on his clothes. Astonished and stupefied at this unexpected reception, he missed his footing on a slippery wheel-rut, and fell prostrate in the centre of the road. In another moment the battle surged over and about him, as did the fighting

“Around Valerius dead.”

The terrific fire which we poured into the foe at close range stopped their advance; but some of the bolder spirits pushed on, and hand-to-hand conflicts ensued



"Reserving our fire until they should come well within range."

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between them and our mighty men of valour. I saw "Romulus" and "Remus" and Tommy Bray's lieutenant close, and go down in a heap together upon the ground, the twins uppermost. Then a snowball struck me between the eyes, and for the time being obscured my vision.

When I once more recovered my sight, the enemy were in full retreat. Mr. Greenaway had wisely sought shelter in his own domicile, though minus his hat, which had fallen into the hands of the Brayites, who seemed to imagine that it belonged to one of us; for they carried it off in triumph, and threw it into the branches of a tree in a neighbouring garden, from which elevated position Brewer afterwards rescued it with the aid of a ladder. Tommy Bray was all this time a prisoner, but as there seemed no chance of holding him to ransom, he was liberated after promising to keep the peace in future.

"He tried to bite," said Spring gently, "so I crammed snow into his mouth."

The bell was ringing for afternoon school, and we hurried indoors flushed with triumph, and highly gratified with the result of the conflict. Wood, always a croaker, was the only one to sound a discordant note in our song of victory.

"I say," he remarked, "what about old Greenaway?"

That same evening a rapid thaw set in, and next day everything out of doors was damp and miserable. After dinner we wandered into the playground, but the whole place was a sea of slush and mud.

"We can't do anything here," said Fraser; "let's go back into the stable."

As he was speaking we heard some one kick the partition, and the next moment Brewer's head appeared above the boards.

"I've got something to say to you young fellers," he began. "The master isn't going to stand your carryings-on any longer."

"What d'you mean?" asked "Romulus."

"Why, I mean this, that one or two of you'll find yourselves brought before the magistrates before you're many days older."

"Well, we could not help his getting snowballed," retorted Fraser. "He ran out into the middle of it, and it was as much the fault of the town boys as of our fellows."

"Yes, you'll get into trouble over that too, I reckon," answered the man. "But that's not what I'm referring to; what I mean is the smashing up of all our crocks

and best china the other night when I was out of the kitchen."

A cold chill ran down my back, and even Fraser's jaw dropped. There was a dead silence; no one made any reply.

"Oh yes," continued the man, preparing to return to his work, "you thought you got away without my knowing who it was; but I've got something that'll be a proof at all events against one of you, and he'll have to own up and take the consequences. You've gone a bit too far this time, and I shan't be surprised if some of you don't get sent to prison."

The story of our raid had by this time become known to everybody. For a few moments no one spoke, and then Bowden broke the silence.

"Here's another pretty go!" he exclaimed. "You fellows ought to have owned up at once. You're always getting us into beastly rows."

"We're not!" answered Fraser.

"Yes, you are!" retorted Bowden. "There've been more bothers of one kind and another these last two terms than all the rest of the time I've been here put together, and it's always been you and Mobsley and young Dean who've been at the bottom of it all. And now, because you choose to go over and smash old

Greenaway's crockery, we're all going to be hauled into a police-court. It's a jolly shame, and I say you ought to go round straight away and own up that you were the chaps who did it."

The speaker turned on his heel, and sauntered up the path followed by the rest of the company. No one spoke; everybody seemed pondering over the situation in silence, and Fraser, Mobsley, and I were left alone.

"Look here," said the first-named, "I'll go and tell old Greenaway that I did it."

"No, you won't," answered Mobsley. "If it was anybody's fault, it was mine."

"It wasn't," answered Fraser, in a gloomy tone, and grinding his heel into the gravel. "I proposed it. Bowden's quite right—I'm at the bottom of all the rows. Look at that affair yesterday: if I hadn't got Medlar to let us play football in the park, we shouldn't have started having fights with Bray and those other cads. I didn't see any harm in trying to start proper games; but there seems bad luck in everything I do, and I shan't try any more."

I had always admired the intrepid "Hawk-eye," and yet somehow my heart had never gone out to him as it did now in this moment of dejection and failure.

"Yes, you will," I answered feebly. "Some day we shall get a field, and—look here, I'll go and tell old Greenaway it was I who smashed up the things in his kitchen."

Fraser laughed.

"Oh yes," he said. "Fancy young Dean smashing anything! No; it was my plan, and I shall go."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mobsley; "until the row begins we'll neither of us go. I don't believe Brewer can prove it, and he may have said that only to frighten us. At all events, we'll wait and see what happens."

There was no denying the wisdom of the "Great Serpent," and we decided to act on his advice.

"Brewer hates us like poison," grumbled Fraser, as we wandered up the path. "I wonder if that explosion on bonfire night was his doing?"

"I wonder who that was I saw among the trees," I said; "it wasn't Brewer."

"There's something about that shrubbery I don't understand," added Mobsley significantly. It was a delightful thing to have a real mystery there on the premises, and Mobsley meant to make the most of it.

"D'you remember," he continued, "that hot night back in the summer when we looked out of our win-

dow and saw a light moving about there? Well, I believe it was—”

“Old Soper hunting for moths,” interrupted Fraser impatiently. “You won’t get me to believe any of your gammon about ghosts, and tall, dark figures in cloaks; it’s all rubbish!”

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOME-COMING OF MOBSLEY'S HANDKERCHIEF.

WE were not left very long in doubt as to whether Brewer's assertion that he possessed a proof of our guilt was merely an empty threat. The following morning, just after breakfast, we boarders were standing about in the playground, when the manservant's head once more made its appearance above the boards.

“I was saying yesterday that I knew some of you had a hand in smashing the things in our kitchen the other night,” he began. “Well, here's my proof, and whoever it belongs to had better own up at once, and save the others from getting into trouble.”

As he spoke he raised his left hand from behind the partition, and displayed—oh, horror!—a coloured representation of the “Adventures of Ten Little Nigger Boys.”

At any other time it would have seemed impossible that such an innocent and harmless thing as one of Mobsley's picture handkerchiefs could have struck terror and dismay into any heart; yet for a moment mine ceased to beat as I gazed upon this evidence of our guilt.

"Now then!" the speaker continued, "whose is it? It belongs to one of you, right enough."

Bowden was the one to reply.

"It's Mobsley's," he said.

There was a hiss, and some one ("Romulus," I believe) murmured,—

"Shut up, you sneak!"

"And which of you's Mobsley?"

"Chingachgook" stepped forward. As I have said before, he was always calm and collected in any especially trying circumstances, and on this occasion his manner was thoroughly in keeping with his character of a great Indian chief.

"Yes, it's mine," he said. "But, look here, it was all an accident. It was Dingo and the cat smashed the things, and I put my handkerchief round the dog's neck to haul him out of the kitchen, because he wouldn't come when I called."

"Don't you try to gammon me," retorted the man

angrily. "How came you to be in the kitchen at all, or anywhere near it? I suppose that was an accident, too. No, my young spark, you won't get over me with tales of that kind, don't you fear!"

"It *was* an accident," pleaded Mobsley. "You might let it pass this time. I'll give you anything if you will. 'Gold, silver, powder, lead—all that a warrior needs—shall be in thy wigwam.'"

Brewer did not appear to have read "The Last of the Mohicans;" at all events, he did not recognize the quotation, and seemed to think that Mobsley was trying to make fun of him.

"Hold your tongue!" he shouted angrily. "Let you off, indeed! I'll take precious good care I don't. You'll find before long it ain't no laughing matter!" And with this as a last parting shot, he disappeared.

Fraser turned on Bowden with a face glowing with rage.

"You sneak!" he cried.

"I'm not," retorted the other; "it's you yourself who are the sneak. Why didn't you own up yesterday?"

"Yes, why didn't you own up?" chimed in Simpson. "It's just like you fellows—doing mad things and getting other people into trouble. I suppose you thought

we were going to share the blame, like we did over that blind man's buff business!"

"No, I didn't," answered Fraser. "When the row came, we should have told old Greenaway ourselves."

Bowden was about to reply, when he was interrupted by "Gentle Spring."

"Look here, Bowden," exclaimed the latter, speaking with an amount of animation which he had never been known to exhibit before: "you *are* a sneak, and you know it. You're a dirty sneak, and so's Simpson. You said the other day that we ought to hire some man to thrash Brewer. You're always grumbling and finding fault, and when it comes to doing anything, you turn tail, and run away like you did at Carlsham Park when those cads collared our football. You're no good for anything but eating, so just keep your mouth for that, and don't jaw!"

This sudden and unlooked-for burst of eloquence on the part of "Gentle Spring" awed every one else into silence. He stood there, lanky and raw-boned as ever, but impatiently kicking the gravel with one ungainly foot, like some broken-down old war-horse that had escaped from a cab-rank, and now once more found itself "snuffing the battle." "Gentle Spring" had pommelled me, and broken my best bone penholder,

because I had received higher rank than himself in the fire brigade, and I had hated him accordingly; but now all these past differences were forgotten, and I could have embraced him, and shed tears upon his crumpled collar. At the time of our first acquaintance I have described him as having the appearance and bearing of a calf; but when I heard him stick up for us in this noble manner, he might have been something between a rather underfed lion and an angel.

* * * * *

That dreadful morning! I thought school would never end. Mr. Soper asked if I felt unwell, but I shook my head. Miss Trigg had one unfailing remedy for all complaints, but mine could not be cured with castor-oil.

At last twelve o'clock came, and Fraser, Mobsley, and I retreated to a quiet corner of the garden for a consultation. Fraser had just received a letter from home, but held it in his hand unopened.

"I say, 'Chingachgook,'" he remarked, "you were stupid to leave that handkerchief behind. I shouldn't have thought you'd have done a thing like that."

"No," groaned Mobsley; "I was an ass. But never mind, I shall take the blame; he won't know that you fellows were there."

"Of course he will!" answered "Hawk-eye." "It was my plan, and I shall say I did it."

The heroic spirit was upon us—each one wished to sacrifice himself for the sake of the others; but in the end it was agreed that we must act our parts according to the book, and that "Hawk-eye" and the Mohicans must stand together to the last.

This decision having been arrived at, Fraser opened his letter. For a time he perused its contents in silence; then he looked up with an exclamation of dismay.

"I say, what d'you think's going to happen?"

"What?"

"Why, the mater says I've got to leave at Christmas!"

This was the last straw. We stared at each other in silence; in another moment I believe we should all three have wept aloud, if our attention had not been attracted by "Gentle Spring," who, in hurrying down the path towards us, tripped up over the handle of the roller, and nearly dashed himself to pieces against the trunk of an apple-tree.

"Oh my!" he muttered; "I hope I haven't smashed anything."

"What—bones?" we inquired.

"No, my museum," he answered, holding up his old

cigar-box. "I've had a row with Bowden and Simpson, and I'm not going shares with them any longer."

"How's that?"

"Why, because of Bowden sneaking about Mobsley's handkerchief. They're the two meanest beggars in the school, and I won't have anything more to do with them. Look here, you fellows, you've got a museum, too, haven't you? Well, would you like either of my things? Would—would you like—my glass eye?"

"Gentle Spring" had certainly been coming out lately in the most extraordinary manner, and with this last munificent offer the breadth and depth of his generous nature stood revealed. When things had been going well with us, he had never seemed anxious to make friendly advances; but now, when we were under the weather—the victims of misfortune, and living in hourly expectation of being involved in a terrible disaster—he stood by us nobly, and, as a further expression of sympathy, actually offered us the glass eye, one of the most cherished of all his possessions.

The proffered gift was of course declined.

"It's awfully good of you, Spring," said Fraser. "You don't think we're mean, do you? Of course we shall own up when the row comes."

Spring said he didn't, and further affirmed that if we had told him of our expedition he would have gone himself, and not only assisted Dingo in wrecking the kitchen, but would have attempted to smash Brewer into the bargain. Comforted by this assertion, we proceeded to examine the contents of the cigar-box.

"The spirit's nearly all evaporated out of this bottle that the centipede's in," explained the owner; "I couldn't get any more. Hannah gave me some of Miss Trigg's rhubarb wine, but I'm afraid it's not exactly the same thing. I believe some of these coins are valuable; but this idol's worth an awful lot—it's got a jewel in its eye."

The little wooden figure was passed from hand to hand, and examined with due reverence. One of the eye-sockets was empty, while in the other was what looked like a bit of dull red glass.

"Is it really a jewel?" asked Mobsley.

"Yes, rather!" answered Spring: "it's a ruby. Well, I must hook it now, because I've got an exercise to finish. But, look here, don't you pay any attention to what Bowden and Simpson say; they're a couple of sneaks, and they both want licking."

With this parting remark, uttered in the mildest

tone imaginable, the speaker turned and started off with his usual shambling trot to return to the house.

"Awfully decent sort old Spring is," muttered Fraser. "I wish I'd been a bit more civil to him when he came. We might make him a Mohican."

"There's no one for him to be," answered Mobsley, "except Gamut or Major Hayward."

"Oh, they're no good! Hayward never killed anybody. When he fired the pistol at Maqua in the cavern, he missed him; and in the fight on the top of that hill, he'd have been stabbed by that Huron if 'Hawk-eye' hadn't knocked the beggar on the head."

"He might be old Munro," I suggested.

"Munro!" retorted Fraser; "he's a jolly sight too good for that old sop-head, who was always blubbering for his wretched 'babes.'"

"Well, as he's 'Gentle Spring,' he might be one of the 'gentle ones,'" said Mobsley. "Not that little softy of an Alice, but why shouldn't he be Cora?"

The idea of "Gentle Spring," with his calf-like appearance, personating the proud, dark-haired beauty, for a description of whose countenance alone five adjectives were required! It needed a stronger effort of the imagination than I think even Mobsley himself was capable of exerting. In addition to this, Fraser

was determined that we would have no women in our book ; for, as he ungallantly declared, "they spoiled everything."

The proposal, therefore, that Spring should join our number had to be abandoned ; and so the association of "Hawk-eye" and the two "Mohicans" remained the same from the commencement down to the end of the chapter.

Afternoon school passed, and still the threatening cloud which hung over our devoted heads did not break. After the day boys had left, we wandered once more down the path into the deserted play-ground.

"I wonder if Brewer will sneak," said Fraser ; "there'll be a fearful row if he does. Old Greenaway's sure to be in a frightful wax about that snowballing ; and when he hears of this business, I shouldn't wonder if he sets the police on our track."

"D'youthink we could bribe Brewer ?" I asked.

"No," answered Mobsley gloomily. "I told him yesterday that if he wouldn't split, everything a warrior needed should be in his wigwam ; but he wouldn't take it on. Besides," added "Chingachgook" candidly, "the fact is, I've got nothing to give him."

"Nor have I," muttered Fraser. "I haven't a single

red cent in the world, and I shan't have till journey money's given out."

We wandered back to the house pondering over the coming calamity and our helplessness to avert it; but on reaching the schoolroom another matter was forced on our attention, which for the time being caused us to forget our own trouble.

As we entered, the other boarders were scattered about the room, but all with their faces turned toward "Gentle Spring," who stood in front of his desk, with the little idol in his hand, evidently addressing the assembly.

"It's been done some time this afternoon," he was saying. "I'm sure of that, because I looked at it just before dinner, and it was all right."

"Well, don't you say it was me or Simpson," growled Bowden. "It was all right when I gave it back to you this morning."

"I don't say it was any one here," answered Spring. "It may have been one of the day boys. All I know is it's gone."

"What's gone?" asked Fraser.

Spring turned.

"Hallo!" he said; "here's Fraser. He can tell you it was all right this morning."

“That *what* was all right?”

“Why,” answered Spring ruefully, “some one’s gouged my idol’s eye out.”

“What—the jewel?”

“Yes, the ruby.”

There was a moment’s silence, during which the tea-bell began to ring.

“Bosh!” said Bowden, as we moved towards the door. “It was no more a ruby than that pane of window glass is a diamond; it was only a trumpery red bead. I told Spring it was the first time I saw the thing.”

After the amount of kind feeling he had recently shown towards us, Fraser, Mobsley, and I felt bound to sympathize with Spring in his misfortune; and for this purpose, when the meal was over, we gathered round him, to obtain further particulars about his loss.

“It’s gone, right enough,” said the owner, taking the idol from his desk. “And I believe it was done some time between dinner and afternoon school. Everybody was down in the playground then, and some chap must have sneaked up and done it when no one else was in the room.”

We took the little wooden figure, and passed it from

one to the other. The empty eye-socket had been scarred and chipped with some sharp instrument. Mobsley examined it last, and after having scrutinized it carefully for some time, he took out of his pocket a small magnifying-glass, and looked at the idol's face again, this time holding it close under a gas-jet. The other fellows were carrying on a noisy conversation, squabbling for places in front of the fire, and paid no attention to what we were doing. Mobsley returned the glass to his pocket, and looked cautiously round to see if any one were listening.

"Look here," he said: "the chap who did this smashed the point of his knife, and it's here sticking in the wood. Lend me that little pair of tweezers in your jack-knife, Fraser, and I'll get it out."

"Chingachgook" proceeded to operate on the disfigured features of the idol, and succeeded in extracting a small fragment of steel, which he deposited in the palm of his hand.

"There!" he remarked; "that shows how it was done."

We had no time for further speculation, for at that moment Mr. Soper appeared, and ordered us to get our books and commence work. In preparation we did not occupy our usual seats, but sat in two rows

at the top of the room. The desk at which I found myself on this particular evening had not been allotted to any boy at the commencement of the winter term, and thus standing empty, it was appropriated as a sort of rubbish-basket by those in the neighbourhood, and was now half filled with waste-paper, orange-peel, bits of wood, fragments of torn lesson-books, and other *débris*. A knot had been knocked out of the lid, and through this hole I happened to drop a fragment of lead pencil which I had been fumbling in my fingers as I repeated my lesson. It was seldom that one could get hold of a good black pencil at Hanover House, and I could not rest until I recovered my cherished stump of BB.

Waiting until Mr. Soper had turned over a fresh page of the book he was reading, I cautiously half opened the desk, and began routing about among its contents. The pencil had disappeared amidst a chaos of rubbish ; but at length I found it, and at the same time discovered another treasure. At the very bottom of the desk, under a torn exercise-book and some pieces of broken slate, was a small pearl-handled pocket-knife.

It was certainly not a very valuable article ; the big blade was broken off short, and the little blade

—I started, and signalled to Mobsley, “Wish to communicate.” The latter slid along the form, and I passed him my find. He examined it for a moment, and then the expression of his countenance also underwent a change.

“Where did you find it?” he whispered.

“In this desk.”

“I say, it's—”

“Mobsley, you're talking,” said Mr. Soper. “Be quiet, sir, or I shall give you an imposition.”

Preparation dragged through to its finish, and Mr. Soper gathered up his books and papers and left the room. The moment the door had closed behind him Mobsley sprang up.

“Who owns this knife?” he exclaimed.

I had a suspicion that it must belong to either Bowden or Simpson, but the answer to the question came from an altogether unexpected quarter.

“Where did you get that from?” cried “Remus;” “it's mine.”

“Yours!”

“Yes; why shouldn't it be? What's the matter with it?”

“Why, it's this that gouged the eye out of Spring's idol. The end of the blade's broken. I found the

bit sticking in the wood, and if you put the two together, they fit exactly."

For a moment every one was too much astonished to speak ; then it was "Romulus" who broke the silence.

" You're a cad, Mobsley !" he cried hotly. " What d'you mean by saying that young John stole Spring's ruby ? "

It was altogether a surprise to hear one Jones standing up for the other ; even "Remus" was a trifle disconcerted by this action on the part of his brother.

" Look here, Arthur," he murmured, " I'm as old as you are."

" I don't care what you are," snorted the other—"you aren't a thief ; and if Mobsley says that again, I'll punch his head."

" I never said 'Remus' was a thief," answered "Chingachgook." " I said that it was this knife that was used to cut out the idol's eye ; and you can see that at a glance."

It was perfectly true : the piece of steel fitted exactly to the broken point.

" When did you use the knife last ? " asked Gale.

" I don't know. I wasn't aware I'd lost it ; I thought I had it in my pocket."

"Look here, John," said Arthur solemnly, "did you crib that ruby?"

"No, of course I didn't!"

"Romulus" gave vent to a sigh of relief.

"If you had," he murmured, "I should have given you a licking."

"No, you wouldn't, Arthur," answered "Remus" promptly.

"Romulus" pondered for a moment.

"No; I don't suppose I should," he answered thoughtfully. "The whole thing's nonsense, because, in the first place, you'd never crib anything. You ain't much good, but I'll swear you aren't as bad as that."

I had seen the Joneses declare war on each other twenty times in one day, but here they were actually making peace and forming an alliance. I can assure the reader it was a moving spectacle.

CHAPTER XVI.

FINDING THE IDOL'S EYE.

"LISTEN, 'Hawk-eye,' and your ear shall drink no lies."

The "Scout" had got out of bed rather late, and was washing furiously at one of the basins, sending showers of water in all directions. He only grunted.

"Listen, 'Hawk-eye,'" repeated Mobsley, as he prepared to go downstairs. "The Joneses no more cribbed that ruby than you or I."

Until late on the previous evening, and again when the getting-up bell woke us in the morning, the theft of the idol's eye had been the chief topic of conversation. Each one of us had some different theory to suggest, and suspicion had fallen on nearly everybody in turn, including Miss Trigg and Mr. Soper.

"Well, all I know is I didn't crib it," spluttered Fraser. "I believe myself it was one of the day boys. Spring'll never see it again—at least that's my opinion ;

and if you *can* spot the thief, 'Chingachgook,' why, you'll be a cleverer chap than you look." And so saying, the speaker dragged his shirt on wrong side in front, and Mobsley and I hurried off downstairs.

The conversation in the schoolroom turned on the same subject. Bowden thought he remembered that Slade had been kept in to do some sums, and suggested that he might have opened Spring's desk and made off with the treasure. At a quarter to nine, when the day boys began to arrive, the whole story had to be gone through again ; and the newcomers, naturally resenting the insinuation that one of their number was the culprit, declared that it must have been a boarder.

"It was young Jones's knife, and young Jones must have done it," they said ; and this remark, made first in an off-hand manner by Marsden, became at length the general verdict.

"Romulus" was furious. Hitherto he had always been prepared to join forces with any one who had a quarrel with his brother, but now he was ready to fall on all those who dared to charge "Remus" with the theft ; and, indeed, in the short space of time before the school bell rang he brought off two fights, and was making active preparations for a third. This last encounter, however, was destined never to take place ;

for before the eleven o'clock interval something was discovered which put an entirely different complexion on the case, and caused the honour of John Jones to be no longer called in question. As might have been expected, the person who made this important "find" was the sagacious "Chingachgook," and the manner in which it came about was as follows:—

In Latin lesson the "Great Serpent's" nose began bleeding, and Mr. Soper gave him leave to go upstairs to fetch a fresh handkerchief.

"I say," whispered Gale, as he passed along the back of the form, "bring down my stamp album; it's in one of the little top drawers in our room."

Mobsley went upstairs, doctored his nose with the door-key, loitered about until he thought the work would be changed (as he was shaky in his Caesar), and then went across to the other room. There were two dressing-tables. He pulled out one of the small top drawers, but the collars and handkerchiefs in it were marked "Bowden." In attempting to push the drawer back again he found it had stuck. After trying it several times he pulled it right out, and stooped down to fit it more carefully into its place. As he did so, his eye caught sight of a small object lying right at the back of the opening. It was a fusee-box.

Between the end of the drawer and the back board of the framework was a small space ; in this the little box might have lain unfound for any length of time. Mobsley drew it out ; it contained half a dozen fusees and a little screw of paper. He unrolled the latter, and his jaw dropped—it was “Gentle Spring’s” ruby !

But the idol’s eye was not the sole cause of Mobsley’s astonishment. He rammed the drawer back in its place, and drew the small tin match-box from his waist-coat pocket. The fusees which exploded our fireworks had been double-headed with red wooden sticks, and now, as he once more examined their charred remains, Mobsley found them to be in every way exactly similar to those he had just discovered.

Latin had been changed for French, and French for dictation, and the long hand of the schoolroom clock was approaching eleven o’clock.

“*Silence !*” cried Mr. Medlar, thumping his desk. “If this noise and inattention continue, you shall all remain at your places for half an hour after school.”

The rebuke was certainly not unmerited, for ever since Mobsley’s return from upstairs a mysterious agitation had been spreading throughout the assembly. Notes had been flipped from one desk to another, excited remarks had been exchanged in hurried whispers,

and Wood managed to get the word "idol" into his dictation, though the piece read out by Mr. Soper had nothing to do with the heathen.

Soon the whole place was in a ferment. It was very evident that something was going to happen; and we were not left very long in doubt as to what that something would be, for as the crowd surged out into the yard for the usual recess, Marsden cried out, "Seize him!" and violent hands were laid on Bowden.

"Collar Simpson as well," cried "Romulus;" "they're both in the same boat."

The two cronies were promptly surrounded, and, in spite of their threats and expostulations, hauled along the path leading to the playground.

Fifteen minutes is only a short space of time, but a good deal can be accomplished in it when people are in earnest.

"What shall we do with them?" inquired Marsden.

"A trial! a trial!" shouted a dozen voices, and a space was cleared to represent a court.

Looking back from a "grown-up" point of view at the events of that period, one is inclined to think them funny and even trivial; but at the time I know some of them seemed solemn enough, and among others, this arraignment of Bowden and Simpson made such an

impression on my mind that I have remembered every detail to the present day.

The back of the iron seat was our "bench," and Fraser, Marsden, and Jellicoe mounted it as judges. The last named was our head-boy. He was a mild, short-sighted youth who wore spectacles, and was altogether useless and out of place in his present situation, but had been forced into it in order to give an air of dignity and importance to the proceedings.

"Well," said Marsden, "what have they been doing? Look sharp, or we shan't get through before the bell rings. Who's going to speak first?"

There was a clamour of voices—every one wished to speak first; and to prevent confusion, "Gentle Spring," who was acting as assistant-jailer, was called upon to open on the side of the prosecution.

"I don't know that there's much to jaw about," said Spring, in his usual apologetic manner. "I had a little god in my museum, and some one gouged his eye out. It was a ruby."

“‘ Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head,’ ”

quoted Jellicoe solemnly.

"Shut up, Jelly!" cried one or two irreverent listeners, who did not appreciate the interruption, and

were altogether lacking in the respect due to the senior's exalted position. "Don't speak till you're spoken to, you old crock!—Go on, Spring." Jellicoe subsided, and the "gentle one" continued his story.

"Well, that's all, except that Mobsley's just found the ruby in a match-box at the back of Bowden's drawer, and so I suppose he did it."

"That's not fair," cried Bowden; "any one might have put it there. Besides, it was proved that it was young John Jones's knife had done it."

"Remus" said nothing, but "Romulus" was up in arms in a moment.

"It wasn't John who did it!" he shouted, dancing out into the open space in the centre of the "court." "He's not a thief, and if any one says he is, I'll—"

"Here, stop that row!" interrupted Marsden peremptorily.—"Take him away, some one, and sit on his head."

The impetuous "Romulus" was hustled back into the crowd, and "Chingachgook" stepped forward, calm and collected as when he had sat by the fire in the ruins of William Henry.

"I found the ruby in this fusee-box," he began; "and there's something else I want to say about it. Just before the Fifth of November we had a row with the

prisoners, and they wouldn't subscribe to our fireworks." The speaker paused for a moment, fumbling for something in his pocket. Bowden preserved the same sullen look, but Simpson's face grew positively ghastly.

"We bought the fireworks, and, as you know, they all exploded before we had time to let them off. We found out afterwards that some one had dropped fusees in among them. They were double-headed ones on red sticks. I kept them—here they are—and you'll find they're just the same as the ones in this box of Simpson's."

The last remark was really a slip of the tongue, but it brought about an unlooked-for result. Simpson at all times considered his own welfare only, and just now he was in a pitiable condition of "funk."

"'Twasn't my box!" he blurted out; "'twas Bowden's!"

This statement, to use a modern expression, simply "gave away" the whole business. In a moment the whole court was in an uproar. Marsden sprang up with such eagerness to view the fusee-box that he upset the seat, and the judicial throne, with its occupants, went over backward, causing great consternation among the crowd assembled in the rear, and adding in no small degree to the confusion and excitement of the moment.

At length order was restored, and the bench was righted. Jellicoe, however, who had bumped his head rather severely against the toe of somebody's boot, refused to resume his place, and murmuring that he believed that Marsden had done it on purpose, walked off in a sulk, rubbing the back of his injured cranium.

"Well, if the box is Bowden's," said Marsden, "I should think it's pretty evident that he's guilty.—What have you got to say for yourself?" added the judge, turning towards the prisoner.

Bowden saw it was no use denying the charge, and so determined to try to make the best of it.

"Well, I don't see there's any need to make such a fuss about it," he began. "That rotten little idol of Spring's is worth nothing. He lent it us for our museum. And I know the eye isn't a ruby; it's only a glass bead. If he likes, I'll give him my mummy's earring to make good the damage. We only did it in joke."

"You keep on saying *we*," exclaimed Simpson, who was ready to sink to any depth of meanness to save his own skin. "There's no *we* about it. You proposed it, and you did it, and it was you dropped the fusees among the fireworks."

Bowden's pasty face flushed with anger.

"You beastly sneak!" he cried, rounding on his former companion. "You know you were in it too. Very well, I'll tell something you did. Last term you killed Mobsley's white mice by putting insect powder in their bread and milk, to pay him out for that row in the stable when Fraser smacked your head."

This last exposure was followed by what the newspapers would describe as a "scene in court." Hoots, groans, and hisses rent the air, and the judgment-seat had a narrow escape of another capsize as the two judges sprang to their feet.

"You thief, Bowden!" cried Fraser. "You stole that ruby, and tried to make us think that 'Remus' had taken it!"

"They're guilty, right enough," added Marsden. "What shall we do with them?"

"Gentle Spring" inquired if I had any cod-liver oil left, but I answered that the bottle was empty, and at that moment several voices cried out, "Make 'em run the gauntlet!"

I suppose schoolboys are much the same sort of creatures now as they were twenty-five years ago—at all events, I know that in my day to run the gauntlet was no joke; and in this case I am not sorry that the punishment inflicted should have been severe, for both

of the culprits deserved all that they received. Most of the day boys had book-straps in their pockets, which were regarded as legitimate weapons, and the practice was not unknown of making the knot of an ordinary handkerchief heavier by the insertion of a piece of india-rubber.

"Look sharp!" cried Marsden; "the bell will ring in a jiffy."

The crowd hastily formed a "course" round the playground, and the two prisoners were placed ready to start. Then some wild impulse induced Bowden to bolt. He burst through the bystanders, endeavouring to gain the path leading to the house, and Simpson followed his example.

A scene of the wildest confusion followed. Marsden barred the entrance to the garden, thus heading off the quarry, and every one gave chase. We flogged the culprits, lashed each other, fell over one another, and banged our heads together. Simpson fell an easy prey. He was driven up into a corner, and there a cosy little party, consisting of "Romulus" and "Remus," Watkins, and two other day boys, walloped him to their hearts' content. Bowden, however, charged madly round the square, ducking and dodging to escape the shower of blows aimed at his hulking "carcass."

Just when the excitement was at its height the school bell rang, and brought the performance to an abrupt termination. I had retired early from the fray, some over-zealous comrade having in the excitement of the chase given me a stinging cut across the calf with a book-strap; and as I paused to rub the wounded member, I saw the head of Mr. Greenaway's man appear above the boarding. He had evidently come to see what the row was about, but at that moment the tumult ceased.

Bowden, sobbing with pain, found his tongue.

"All right, Fraser, you cad!" he sobbed. "You talk about me being a thief, and all the time you've stolen a silver cup from some one—you know you have, you horrid burglar!"

As the closing portion of this sentence was uttered I happened to turn and glance at Brewer. For a moment a most extraordinary expression appeared upon his face; then, without a word, he disappeared behind the boards.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW WE SOLD THE SILVER TANKARD.

SIMPSON and Bowden had certainly come a cropper, and the latter was, as usual, prepared to lay it all at Fraser's door, who, he declared, "had done it out of spite," though it was impossible to see any reason for this senseless statement. The guilt of the two culprits had been clearly proved, and the only two details which we could not at first understand were explained in a confession made by Simpson later on in the day. The paper bag with the confectioner's name on, which had been produced as a proof that the pair had been to Penston on the afternoon when the mice were killed, was really an old one, and the biscuits which it contained had not come from any greater distance than the shop at the corner of the Carlsham Road. With equal cunning, as soon as the fireworks had been ignited by the fusee (dropped over the boards from a corner of the shrubbery) the culprits had rushed back to the house,

and exchanged their muddy boots for dry slippers, and in this manner had once more been successful in pleading an *alibi*.

Considering the magnitude of their offences, every one agreed that the punishment which Bowden and Simpson had received was richly deserved; and the thought that the cruel fate of the white mice had been avenged gave Fraser, Mobsley, and myself intense satisfaction.

We were still in this pleasant frame of mind when the morning dawned of that fatal Wednesday the nineteenth of December, a day which, as the reader will shortly discover we had good cause to remember.

After breakfast Fraser was sent by Mr. Medlar on an errand to the post-office. He came back with a face as long as a fiddle.

“What’s the matter?” asked Mobsley, who was sitting by my side in the schoolroom.

“Come outside,” answered “Hawk-eye”; “I’ve something to tell you.”

We adjourned to a quiet corner of the yard, and there Mobsley repeated his inquiry.

“It’s all up!” replied Fraser—“we’re gone coons!”

To hear the stout-hearted “Scout” speak in this doleful and hopeless fashion was most alarming.

“What’s up—what do you mean?”

“Why, as I was coming back from the post, I met that villain Brewer. I meant to have passed him without speaking, but he got in my way and stopped me. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I suppose you think I’ve forgotten about that little housebreaking joke of yours, but I haven’t. I told Mr. Greenaway about it last night, and he’s turning the matter over in his mind to decide whether he shall report you to Mr. Medlar, or put the matter straight away in the hands of the police. So if you don’t want *that* to happen, I’d advise you to be precious careful how you act for the next day or so, and keep your own side of the wall. Anyway, you’ll catch it pretty hot; and it’ll be a lesson to you in future.’”

For a moment neither of us spoke.

“Perhaps, after all, he won’t tell the police,” murmured Mobsley, anxious to grasp, like a drowning man, at some straw of hope and consolation.

“Yes; but he’s sure to tell Medlar,” answered Fraser. “And, my eye! think of old Mark when he hears about it: he’ll be as mad as—as a bee in a bottle!”

Work that morning was out of the question as far as I was concerned; my heart had turned to lead, and the weight of it dragged me down to the bottom of the

class. Mr. Soper, with all his failings, had a kind heart: he bore patiently with all my slips and shortcomings, and reported me as being evidently not well; whereupon Miss Trigg told me to come to her at bed-time for a dose of castor-oil.

At half-past twelve, when the day boys went home, Fraser and I strolled down the gravel walk in front of the schoolroom; we had said all that could be said about the trouble in store, and now we stood leaning in silence against the iron railing, staring into the road. As we did so, the gate next door opened with a squeak and closed with a clang.

“Look out!” exclaimed Fraser, dodging behind a holly bush; “here’s old Greenaway coming!”

We slunk into hiding, but only for a moment; then Fraser sprang forward again.

“Why, it’s Dick Adams!” he cried.—“Hallo, Dick!”

The man did not stop, but half turned his head, and as he did so I saw his mouth and throat move as though he were swallowing. I had seen the same thing happen when fellows were caned, and the sight of it in the present instance gave me quite a shock. I slipped out of the gate and ran after him, crying out to him to stop a minute. He heard the clatter of my feet on the pavement, and slackened his speed.

“ Didn’t you hear me call ? ” I gasped. “ Why didn’t you stop ? I wanted to speak to you.”

He took my hand, muttered something about begging pardon, and swallowed again. At that moment Fraser joined us.

“ Hallo, Dick ! ” said the latter. “ How are you getting on ? ”

“ Oh, worse than ever ! ” answered the man huskily.

“ What ! out of work again ? ”

“ Yes ; can’t get none anywhere. And worse than that, there’s mother taken ill, and I can’t do nothing to help her, and I don’t see anything for it but for her to go to the work’us. I’m pretty well off my head ; it’s enough to make a man go away somewhere and drown hisself.”

Here was trouble indeed, by the side of which our own worries sank into utter insignificance.

“ I thought,” continued the man, “ that if I came once more and told Mr. Greenaway how things stood, perhaps he’d give me a job ; but that fellow there wouldn’t let me see him, and threatened if I came again he’d fetch the police.”

“ The wretch ! ” cried Fraser ; “ I should like to shoot him ! And what are you going to do now, Dick ? ”

The man’s head dropped a little. “ I—don’t—know,” he answered slowly.

This was Dick Adams—Dick, who could whistle like a thrush, bark like a puppy dog, and imitate the bagpipes ; Dick, who had run races with us, cut our boats, snowballed us, mended our swing, imperilled his neck for our amusement by walking like a tightrope-dancer along the top of the boards, and endeared himself to us in a hundred different ways ! Here he was, a hopeless, haggard-looking “dead-beat.” The thing was dreadful !

“I say, Dick,” exclaimed Fraser, “I’m awfully sorry for you. I’d give anything to be able to help you, but I haven’t got a cent to my name, and young Dean hasn’t, nor Mobsley either. What can we do ?”

At the sight of our distress the man seemed to pull himself together. “Oh, nothing—nothing, thank you kindly, sir,” he answered. “Perhaps something’ll turn up. At all events, I’m grateful for your sympathy.”

He turned and walked away, and we stood for a moment watching his retreating figure.

“Confound that wretch of a Brewer !” exclaimed Fraser angrily. “I’d shoot him if I had the chance—I would, upon my honour !”

I have often wondered since whether some evil genii heard the wish, and determined it should be granted ; for if ever a man narrowly escaped being shot, that

man was Brewer, and the hand that directed the weapon was the unerring hand of "Hawk-eye."

We retraced our steps to the house, and informed Mobsley of the meeting. In spite of a life spent in slaying and scalping, "Chingachgook" was very tender-hearted; and, unlike some persons who profess a love for living things, he was ready to extend his sympathies even to that creature which is often the most forlorn and helpless of the lot—the luckless biped man. Fraser's recital nearly reduced him to tears.

"It's awful to want to help anybody and not to be able to," he cried. "It's like watching a person drown. How *can* we help him?"

"Hawk-eye" was silent—he did not waste time in vain lamentations—he was thinking.

"How *can* we help him?" repeated Mobsley. "We can't give him anything, because we've got nothing."

"Yes, we have," said Fraser, looking up suddenly—"the silver mug!"

The dinner bell rang at that moment, and brought the conversation to a close. All through the meal we were silent—the same subject was occupying the thoughts of each one of us; and when we regained the playground, Fraser referred to the matter as though it had already been discussed.

“ Well, shall we sell it, or not ? ”

“ I don’t think Bowden would buy it now,” I ventured to remark. “ Ever since we made him run the gauntlet he’s been in such a rage he won’t speak to anybody.”

“ I shouldn’t ask him to buy it,” answered Fraser scornfully. “ For one thing, he couldn’t pay a proper price. There’s a man called Rowe who keeps a little watchmaker’s and jeweller’s shop on the other side of the town ; he buys old silver—I’ve seen a notice up in his window—and that’s where I should take it. As I’m going at the end of this term, I shan’t see anything more of the museum, so I’m quite ready to give up my share in the mug. It’s for you fellows to decide.”

“ I’ll give up my share,” I answered.

“ And I’ll give up mine,” added Mobsley.

“ Well, then, it’s decided that we sell the thing and give the money to Dick. I’ll get leave from Soper for us to go out, and we’ll do it straight away. You slip upstairs and fetch it, Mobsley. Here’s the key of my box.”

In a few moments “ Chingachgook ” returned, with a little bundle under his arm.

“ What have you got there ? ” asked Fraser.

“ I thought I’d better wrap it up, as we’re going all

through the town," answered the other. "I couldn't find any paper, so I rolled it up in one of my handkerchiefs."

I glanced at the covering as he spoke, and saw that it was "The Death of Nelson."

We were soon on our way towards the town, and hurried along, discussing what amount we ought to ask for our treasure. After passing along one of the main thoroughfares, we turned down a couple of side streets, and at length found ourselves standing in front of the shop.

"There you are!" said Fraser, and pointed to a small placard—"Old Silver Bought."

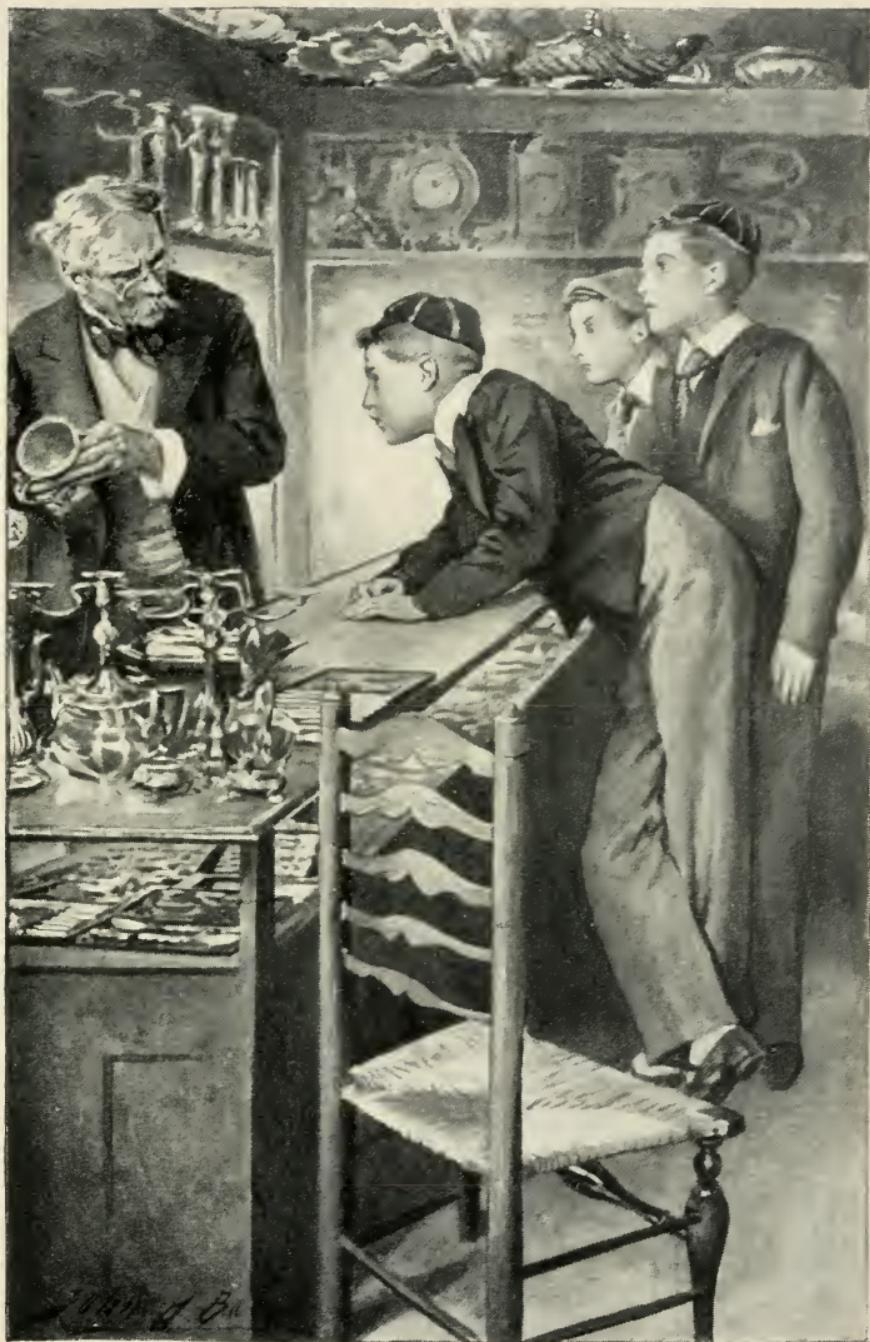
We hesitated for a moment, debating who would go in first.

"Come on!" exclaimed Fraser. "The old chap's squinting at us through the window; he'll think we mean to prig something."

We bundled inside. It was a dirty little place, with a door at the back opening into a workshop.

Mr. Rowe was a wizened old man, deaf, and a trifle lame. Fraser had to shout across the counter to make him understand.

"We want to know if you'll buy this silver cup."



"Where did you get this?"

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The watchmaker took the tankard, and turned it round and round, examining it closely.

“Is it yours?” he asked. “Why do you want to sell it?”

“Yes, it’s ours,” answered Fraser. “But it’s no good to us, and we’d rather have the money.”

The old man grunted; then his eye fell upon the crest. He knit his brows, and held the mug nearer to the light.

“Where did you get this?” he asked suddenly, darting a quick glance at us over his spectacles.

“It’s ours,” answered Fraser, “and we want to sell it.”

“Yes; but that’s not my question,” replied the other sharply. “Where did you get it?”

“I don’t see what that matters,” said Fraser. “What we want to know is whether you’ll buy it.”

Old Rowe made no reply; he moved over to his desk, pulled out some papers, and began to run his eye over their contents. He soon found what he wanted, glanced again at the cup, and then back again at the paper.

“You’ll have to wait a minute,” he said, and then hobbled through the door into the workshop.

There is an old saying, “Little pitchers have long ears.” Perhaps, like many deaf people, the old man spoke in rather a louder tone than he intended to use.

At all events, we heard distinctly every word he said,—

“John, look sharp! slip out round the back, and fetch a policeman.”

That moment I shall never forget; and the effect which this muttered sentence had upon us it would be impossible for me to attempt to describe. I suppose it would have been the wisest plan for us to stand our ground; but in an emergency few people always do the right thing. At the word “policeman” our hearts changed to water. We turned and fled!

I have a dim recollection of banging my shoulder against the doorpost, and of clattering after Fraser through a maze of side streets; then, panting and breathless, we once more found ourselves in the Carls-ham Road.

“Come on!” cried Fraser—“come on inside!”

“But—wa—what did he mean?” I gasped. “W—why—did he send for a policeman?”

“’Cos the thing must have been stolen!” answered “Hawk-eye” breathlessly. “These chaps get lists from the police. What a fool I was! Oh my! we shall have to look out, or we shall find ourselves in prison.”

“But we didn’t steal the mug,” faltered Mobsley.

“We tried to sell it, though. We can’t prove that

we aren't receivers of stolen goods, and that's just as bad. Well, old Rowe's got the mug, and I only hope that we may never hear of it again."

* * * * *

"Dean, my boy," said Mr. Soper, half-way through evening preparation, "you're looking bad again. You don't seem able to do your work. You'd better go to bed. Tell Miss Trigg I sent you."

I went to Miss Trigg ; but, alas ! how could I answer her inquiry as to what was the matter ? She looked at my tongue, shook her head, and gave me a dose of castor-oil.

I crept up to bed, and having the room to myself I wept. All the castor-oil in the world could never ease one poor little conscience of such a burden of guilt!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE “MOHICANS” ARE “WANTED.”

THE following day would, under ordinary circumstances, have been one of the happiest of the whole term; for immediately after breakfast the boarders copied a letter written by Mr. Medlar on the blackboard, by which they informed their parents that they hoped “to rejoin the family circle on Saturday, the 22nd instant.”

I scrawled out the stilted phrases in my best copy-book hand, but my heart was not in the work; nor was it any different with Fraser and Mobsley. We alone knew what fearful things might happen before we should “rejoin the family circle,” and we hardly dared to look so far into the future as the close of that day, let alone the completion of the forty-eight hours which must pass before the dawning of “Saturday, the 22nd instant.”

The vials of old Greenaway’s wrath might at any

moment be uncorked, and the contents poured out upon our devoted heads; but this trouble seemed almost trivial compared with our terror of the consequences of our dealings with the stolen tankard. We feared even to unburden our hearts to Gale or Spring, and went about expecting at any time to be confronted by an officer of the law, and led away to some dreary cell at the police-station.

"I wish we'd never found that wretched mug!" said Mobsley. "I say, *do* you think old Rowe will find out who we are, and have us sent to prison?"

"I can't tell," answered Fraser. "I don't think he knew us. But we're sure to be collared if they put a detective on our track."

At the very thought of such a thing my mouth grew dry and parched. Oh, would that our "Mohican" dream were true, and that the shrubbery were a boundless forest, into the trackless depths of which we could escape, and defy pursuit!

The morning dragged away, and then came dinner. I had no appetite, but forced myself to swallow a few mouthfuls to escape observation. When the meal was over, Fraser and I crept upstairs, and sat down upon our beds.

"This is awful!" muttered "Hawk-eye." "I wish

we knew what was going to happen. If it doesn't end one way or the other, I think I shall go cracked. What can we do? Shall we go and tell old Medlar?"

Before I could answer the question, we heard some one hurrying along the passage, and the next moment Mobsley burst into the room. He had a newspaper in his hand, and his face was the colour of dough. He said nothing, but flung himself down upon his bed and groaned.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Fraser. "What is the matter?"

The "Great Serpent" groaned again.

"It's all up now!" he answered; "read that!"

Fraser snatched the paper from his hand. It was a copy of that morning's *Observer*; and, guided by the mark of Mobsley's thumb-nail, our eyes instantly lighted on the following paragraph:—

"At length there seems to be some likelihood that the thieves who, some months ago, broke into the residence of Sir John Aberton will be discovered and brought to justice. Yesterday a daring attempt was actually made to dispose of a portion of the missing plate, within a couple of miles of the scene of the robbery. Mr. A. Rowe, watchmaker and silversmith, to whose shop, in Hawke Street, the tankard in ques-

tion was brought, recognized the Aberton crest, and promptly dispatched an assistant for the police. As he did so, however, the three culprits appear to have taken alarm; for before Mr. Rowe returned to the shop, they had made their escape, leaving the silver cup in his possession. They are described as being mere boys, and of respectable appearance. A coloured picture handkerchief, representing the death of Nelson, and marked W. M., in which the tankard was wrapped, was also left behind, and it is hoped that this will assist the police in the task of identifying the culprits."

The paper dropped from my companion's fingers. I stared stupidly at it as it lay upon the floor, and found myself reading mechanically an advertisement in the Agony Column:—

"S.—All arranged; to-night for certain. Don't fail.
MOP."

It was Fraser who spoke first. "Oh, you idiot!" he cried; "this is the second time you've done it! Why *do* you drop those beastly picture handkerchiefs wherever you go? Why—"

"Oh, don't go on like that!" moaned the luckless "Chingachgook." "If you only knew what I feel like! I know it's all my fault, and if you like I'll go straight away and tell Medlar—"

"No, you won't!" interrupted Fraser. "It wasn't your fault. If it was anybody's fault, it was mine. I proposed selling the cup. It was another of my confounded suggestions; they all go wrong somehow."

Then I, "young Dean," suddenly found myself making a speech.

"It wasn't your fault either, Fraser. You know very well it was for Dick Adams you wanted to sell the cup; and all the other rows you've got into have been through your trying to start games, and do things for other people. I don't know what this wretched place would be like without you; and when you leave—" I stopped short with a very unpleasant feeling, as though something inside me were just going to burst.

"Well, we'll agree to sink or swim together," said Fraser, in a more cheery tone. "The lad Uncas looks as if he were going to blub, silly little ass! If nothing happens between now and Saturday, it may blow over. Come on; there's the bell."

In the morning and afternoon school always began with a roll-call, and in this particular assembly two boys failed to answer to their names.

"Where are Simpson and Bowden?" inquired Mr. Medlar.

No one answered. We began work, and a full quarter of an hour later the absentees slunk into the schoolroom.

"Come here, you two," cried the head-master. "Where have you been?"

"Please, sir," answered Simpson glibly, "we went down the road a little way, and we didn't think it was so late. My watch was wrong."

"Humph! Let me see your watch."

The boy's face flushed. "It's all right now, sir," he answered; "I've just altered it."

Mr. Medlar stared hard at the speaker. "I have a strong suspicion that you are telling me a lie, sir," he answered sternly. "You and Bowden will each do ten sums for being late. Go to your seats."

"I wonder what they've been up to," whispered Mobsley.

"Dunno," I answered carelessly. If I *had* known, I believe I should then and there have jumped through the nearest window! It was over a month before we learned the cause of our two schoolfellows being late that afternoon, but in time the truth leaked out, and it will be as well for me to inform the reader at once exactly what had happened.

Directly after dinner the two cronies had retired to

their bedroom to share some grub which they had bought on the previous afternoon. It was while they were thus engaged that Fraser and I had come upstairs; and a moment or so later Mobsley joined us in the manner already described.

"I wonder what those chaps are up to," whispered Bowden. "Hist! don't make a row. Let's listen!" He crept forward, and standing just inside his own door, caught disjointed snatches of our conversation. The bell rang, and we went downstairs, little dreaming that we were being watched.

"It's something to do with that silver cup," muttered Bowden. The two friends crossed over the passage, and stood looking into our room.

"They were reading something out of a paper," continued the speaker. "Hallo! there it is, on Fraser's bed. Let's see if I can find the place."

He picked up *The Observer*, and began to run his eye over its columns; then suddenly he burst out with an exclamation of astonishment.

"*Oh, my word! Simpey, listen to this!*"

The paragraph was read and re-read.

"Just fancy! he had the cheek to call me a thief!" cried Bowden, with malicious glee. "But, I say, hurry up, or we shall be late."

"Never mind about being late," answered the other; "read the thing again, and let's make sure. We've got a little account to settle with Master Fraser."

"What d'you mean to do?"

"Do? why, give the police a 'gentle hint' as to who the three boys were."

Bowden stared at his chum, and hesitated.

"Oh, come!" he began. "I don't think I'd do that; it's going a bit too far."

"Too far!" interrupted the other, snapping his teeth like a vicious cur—"too far, after we've been licked up here and thrashed round the playground! Come on downstairs!"

The house was quiet and deserted. Miss Trigg was out, and Mr. Medlar was already at his desk in the schoolroom. Simpson listened for a moment outside the door of the head-master's study, and then he went inside with Bowden at his heels. On the desk was a case containing writing-paper headed "Hanover House Academy." Simpson took a sheet, picked up a quill pen, and after trying the nib on his thumb-nail, scrawled the following sentence, in a disguised hand:—

"The three boys who tried to sell the silver cup to Mr. Rowe come from this school, and their names are Fraser, Mobsley, and Dean."

The note was folded and enclosed in an envelope, which was then addressed:—

“The Superintendent,

“Central Police Station,

“Stockingham.”

“There!” said the writer. “Now come along, and we’ll slip this into the pillar-box at the corner; it’ll be delivered by tea-time.”

The afternoon passed away, and we grew more hopeful.

“Old Greenaway hasn’t said anything,” remarked Fraser, “and Rowe evidently didn’t know who we were. Another day, and the holidays will begin, and we shall be safe.”

“I don’t know how it is,” added Mobsley, “but in books, when people get into an awful fix, just at the last moment, when you think it’s all up, they get off scot free. Now, if we were really living in a book like the ‘Mohicans,’ just about now something extraordinary would happen, and we should get out of all this bother as easily as pat.”

As a matter of fact, something extraordinary *did* happen, but it was altogether different from what we wished for or expected. That evening, as on the memorable occasion when we played the famous

cricket match North *v.* South, Miss Trigg was entertaining company. The guests were the same—the Misses Springle and old Johnstone. The latter and Mr. Medlar were playing chess, while the ladies sat by the fire and talked over their fancy work.

"My dear Amelia," remarked Miss Lydia Springle to her sister, "shall you *ever* forget that evening, back in the summer, when those dreadful boys dropped their wet stockings on my head?"

"Yes," answered Miss Amelia; "and then, when they actually came running downstairs in their *nightshirts*! I thought—well, I really thought I should have fainted!—My dear Jane, how ever you can put up with a dozen of them all the year round I really can't think. Every minute of the day I should be wondering what they were up to."

"At the present moment they're at their supper, I believe," answered Miss Trigg tartly. "You needn't fear they'll misconduct themselves again. As a rule, I'm sure their behaviour is all that can be desired, and— Well, Hannah, what is it you want?"

"If you please, mum," began the girl, who had just knocked at the door, "there's a pliceman come, and says he wants to see the master."

"A policeman!" exclaimed Mr. Medlar, looking up

in astonishment from his game ; " what can he want ? Are you sure it's a policeman ? "

" Yes, sir, it's a policeman right enough," answered Hannah. " He says he's reason to believe that three of the young gentlemen have been a-burgaling a silver cup belonging to Sir John Aberton ! "

At that instant Fraser, Mobsley, and I were retracing our steps from the supper-table to the schoolroom. We passed within two feet of the speaker, and heard every word. For a moment my head seemed to spin round, and my knees trembled ; we all three stood stock-still in the middle of the passage, but only while you could have counted ten. Then Fraser seized both our arms, exclaiming wildly, " Quick—run for it ! "

" Where ? " I gasped.

" *Where ? oh, anywhere ! Into the garden and hide !*"

What object we hoped to gain by this reckless stampede it would be difficult to imagine. The back door was close at hand ; in our sudden panic we tore it open, and rushed recklessly down the path. It was as dark as pitch, and a drizzling rain was falling.

" Make for the shrubbery," panted Fraser, and the next moment we were groping our way through the laurel bushes.

We pushed on towards the wall; then suddenly Mobsley tripped over some obstacle, and at the same moment I fell headlong into a deep pit. I scrambled to my feet, badly shaken and gasping for breath, and as I did so the darkness was suddenly riven by a mysterious beam of light, which shone for an instant, glittering on the wet tree trunks and dripping branches, and then disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOMAHAWK AND REVOLVER.

I WAS too frightened to cry out. All Mobsley's stories of the shrubbery ghost flashed through my mind in a moment, and before I could recover myself sufficiently to shout or run away, the light appeared again, and I saw what it was.

Some one was moving about with a lamp on the other side of the wall, and the light flashed through the unused door, which now stood open.

“How did this pit and mound of earth come here?” whispered Mobsley; “it was never here before.”

He stopped short: just inside old Greenaway's garden a man's voice was speaking,—

“Steady with that lantern; let me fix these things so's I can carry them.”

“It was about time we did our bit of gardening,” said another voice, which we instantly recognized as Brewer's. “Fancy those young whelps finding that

mug ! I went all hot and cold when I read it. I'd like to wring their blessed necks, every one of them ! They've worried me above a bit. At first they used to come running all over this garden, when they knocked balls and things out of the playground, but I soon stopped that little caper ; I didn't want them always knocking round this crib, as you may imagine."

There was a faint jingling noise ; then the other man grunted.

" It's a wonder they didn't dig up the whole lot," he growled. " Well, so long as they haven't got these I don't care ; the cup's nothing. But what made you put it there ? "

" It was too risky keeping it among my clothes," answered Brewer ; " and the old feller was so queer, he might have given me the sack any day, like he did the other chap who was here afore me. Then if I'd planted it in this garden, a new man might have dug it up at any time ; whereas I knew this 'ere place wasn't disturbed—at all events it wasn't until these young villains came messing about, and breaking what I know is their rules."

The stranger muttered some blood-curdling threat about knocking our brains out. " Well, come on," he said, with an oath ; " let's look sharp and finish the

business. I suppose we can fix up the old chap easily enough."

"Oh, I'll soon put him out of the way," answered the other; "you leave that to me."

The two miscreants moved off, their mumbled conversation growing fainter and at last inaudible as they neared the house. For a moment we could hardly speak; the wind sighed in the leafless branches overhead, and the rain pattered down in the darkness as we stood listening to the retreating footsteps. Then Fraser crept forward, and stumbling against Mobsley, caught hold of his arm, exclaiming in a hoarse whisper,—

"I say, d'you know what those fellows are? They're robbers. That other must be S. They've buried some stolen things in this shrubbery, and now they've dug them up, and they are going to take them away."

"I say," gasped Mobsley, "what if they'd known we were here? what if they'd come back and found us?"

"They'd have just about murdered us, I expect," answered Fraser. "Look here, what shall we do?"

For once in his life Mobsley seemed at a loss for a suggestion; and as for me, I think I was too frightened to speak, and could only stand there shaking and trembling, listening to what was said by the others. Fraser was naturally brave; "Chingachgook" could on

occasion acquit himself in a manner worthy of his great namesake ; but Nature never designed me for a hero—I presume I was simply intended to grow a scalp for the adornment of some greater warrior.

“ What shall we do ? ” repeated Fraser.

“ I don’t know,” answered “ Chingachgook.” “ We can’t go back and tell Medlar, because—” He stopped abruptly. The night was very still, and from the direction of our neighbour’s house there came a sound as of falling glass, followed by what seemed like a muffled scream ; then all was quiet.

“ Do you hear that ? ” cried Fraser. “ They’re murdering old Greenaway ; they’re going to rob his place, too. Come on ; let’s see what they’re doing ! ”

The speaker stumbled through the open door, but Mobsley and I stood irresolute.

“ Come on, ‘ Chingachgook,’ ” repeated the fearless “ Hawk-eye ; ” “ what are you waiting for ? —You needn’t come, Dean ; you stay where you are.”

The “ Great Serpent ” took a deep breath, and then went tiptoeing after the Scout. He had fought a great battle with himself, and won any number of scalps in that moment of time. As for me, I remained undecided ; such is the perverseness of human nature that, if our leader had not told me I might stay behind, I think I .

should undoubtedly have run away. I was in a pitiable state of "funk." Only that afternoon we had sworn to stand by each other through thick and thin, and had declared that whatever happened we would sink or swim together. I could be of no service to my comrades; the most I could do was to go and once more get knocked down in their company, but that was better than to let them go alone. I crept through the door, and soon overtook them moving stealthily along the grass border of one of the paths.

The place was quiet; not a sound broke the stillness. There was a light in the kitchen, and but for that the house might have been unoccupied. We paused to listen, then moved on again, and in this manner had gained the little yard in front of the kitchen door, when Fraser tripped over something. It was the dead body of poor Dingo. Mobsley, whose love for animals was ever the ruling passion, stooped down and laid his pitying hand on the dog's head. The next instant he started up with an exclamation of horror, and I saw that he was grasping an axe. Something had changed him from an easy-going, good-natured dreamer into a most reckless and gory-minded desperado.

"Oh, the wretches!" he hissed fiercely. "I'll kill them, I will—I'll kill them both!"

“Come on,” whispered Fraser stolidly, “and let’s see what’s happening.”

The kitchen door was standing ajar; we pushed it open, and crossed the threshold.

For a moment I thought the place was empty; then I saw a pair of wild, bloodshot eyes staring at me from the opposite corner. There, like a shapeless bundle of clothes, was old Greenaway, bound hand and foot, gagged with a big muffler, and tied like a Guy Fawkes to one of his own kitchen chairs. The burglars were nowhere to be seen, but an evidence of their presence lay before us on the table. Fraser stepped forward and snatched it up. It was a six-chambered revolver—the same that had once been fired over the grave of Mobsley’s mice.

What I am going to describe next took, in reality, only a very short time to happen; in fact, looking back, it seems all to have taken place at once, like a single clap of thunder.

As Fraser caught up the weapon, we heard footsteps in the passage leading to the hall; the door opened, and Brewer himself entered the room. For an instant he gazed at us in astonishment; then his expression changed to one of the utmost ferocity.

“You young dogs!” he cried. “What are you doing

here?" If ever there was murder in a man's eye, I saw it in his. He took a step forward, then stopped with a start as he found himself looking down the barrel of his own pistol. The hammer rose slowly; the chambers began to revolve.

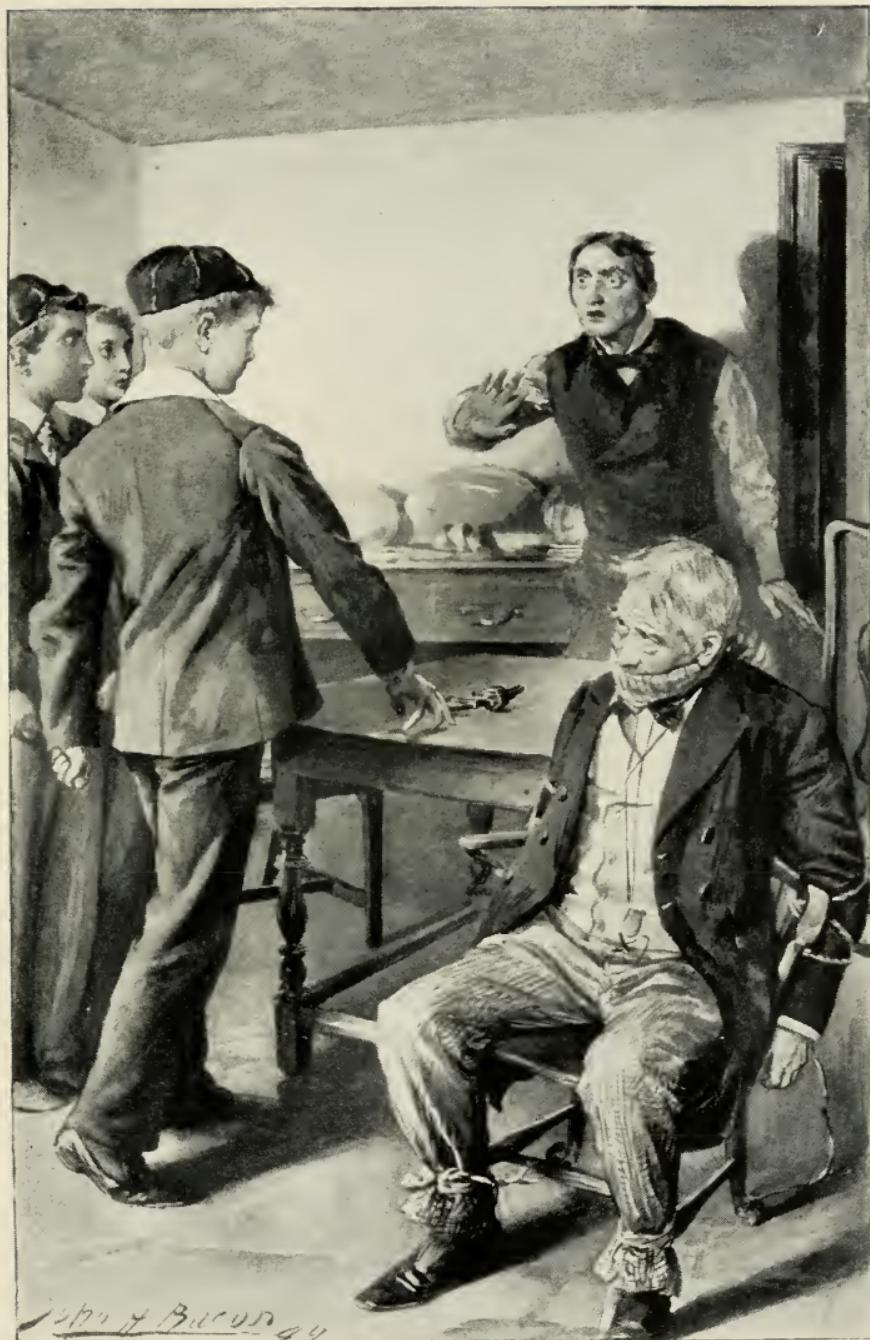
"Stop, stop!" cried the man; "it's loaded!"

"I know it is," answered Fraser, speaking in a thick, unnatural voice; "and if you come any nearer I'll fire!"

"Put that down!" snarled Brewer.

Fraser made no reply; his face was ashy white, but his hand never wavered.

The man stood glaring at us, but made no attempt to move; then suddenly his expression changed, and a gleam of wicked triumph flashed across his face. I turned my head, and saw the cause. Close to my elbow stood a man; I recognized him in a moment: the close-cropped sandy hair, high cheek-bones, and lack of eyebrows—the same head that appeared that Saturday evening through a trap-door in the loft. Unnoticed, he had just entered by the open door behind us. In one hand he held a life-preserver, and taking in the situation at a glance, he raised his arm to strike. The blow was intended for Fraser, but as the burglar stepped forward to deliver it, he brushed against Mobsley.



"Stop, stop!" cried the man; "it's loaded."

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"I don't know how it happened," said "Chingachgook" afterwards. "But when I turned and saw that fellow, I sort of went mad. I just shut my eyes, and struck at him as hard as I could with the axe—and then I felt it hit something, and that was awful!"

There was no necessity for the blow to be repeated; the man clapped his hands to his head, staggered back with a groan, and fell all of a heap in the doorway. Mobsley let his weapon fall with a clang on the stones, clutched at the table, and without a word dropped down in a faint.

This was not all. The sound of the struggle must have shaken Fraser's nerves, and caused his finger to tighten on the trigger. There was a bang and a blinding flash; the bullet grazed Brewer's ear, and, striking the opposite wall, brought down several square inches of plaster with a cloud of dust.

Our old enemy was a coward at heart: he dropped on his knees, crying, "Don't shoot me! I surrender. For pity's sake, don't shoot me!"

I leaned back against the wall, and the room seemed to reel before my eyes like the cabin of a ship; but still Fraser's pluck held out, and his coolness did not forsake him.

Without removing his gaze from the man in front of him, he began to speak.

“Are you there, young Dean?”

“Yes,” I gasped.

“What’s happened to that other fellow?”

“Mobsley’s hit him with the axe and stunned him.”

“Well, look here, run for your life back to the school and bring that bobby. Make haste; if that chap comes round, he’ll murder me.”

I took one hasty glance round the room. In one corner was old Greenaway, gagged and bound—a ghastly object; the strange man was stretched across the threshold, his face covered with blood; Mobsley lay half under the table; and Fraser and Brewer continued to face each other, the latter “held up” by his own revolver. For a single instant my eyes rested on the scene, but long enough for it to be impressed so upon my mind as never to be forgotten. Then I stepped over the prostrate robber, and ran as though grim Death himself were at my heels.

Of what happened next I have but a vague recollection. More than once in the darkness I tripped and fell, and coming through the shrubbery I must have banged my head against a tree, for when I reached the house my cheek was bruised and bleeding. Mr. Medlar

and the policeman were talking together in the hall, and in less than a minute they and old Johnstone were rushing after me down the garden path. How they managed to grasp the meaning of my few disjointed sentences I don't know. I think my face and manner must have told more of the story than my words.

I led the rescuing party up to within a few yards of the kitchen door ; then they rushed past me ; there was a confused babel of voices, and I collapsed. I sat down on Dingo's kennel, and rolled off on to the stones. I felt sick, and closed my eyes ; then after some time the light of a lamp flashed across my face, and I heard the policeman's voice say, "Some one had better look to this youngster. It's been a bit too much for him, I expect."

What took place next I do not clearly remember. Some one picked me off the ground, and a short time later I found myself lying on the sofa in Mr. Medlar's study. Miss Trigg and Hannah were bending over me, and the room seemed full of people. I could hear old Greenaway's squeaky voice mingling with the gruff tones of a police-officer, who was talking with him and Mr. Medlar ; while old Johnstone stood by the fire sipping a glass of brandy and water, and conversing in an animated manner with Mr. Soper.

"There, mum, I thought he'd come round all right in time," remarked Hannah. "He was only frightened, poor child. There ! if it had been me, I think I should have died !"

I stared at her for a moment, and then struggled into a sitting posture. "Where are 'Hawk-eye' and 'Chin-gachgook' ?" I exclaimed ; "are they all right ?"

"He's still a bit mazed," murmured Hannah.

"No, he isn't," said a voice just behind me ; "he means me and Mobsley.—We're all right, Uncas, old chap !"

I turned to greet the "Scout" with a joyful exclamation, but Miss Trigg made me lie back again. "You mustn't talk yet," she said. "Be a good boy, and lie quiet for a bit."

I obeyed reluctantly. Hannah withdrew, and a few moments later Miss Trigg moved away to another part of the room. Then I turned my head and beckoned to Fraser, who leaned over the end of the sofa, and we carried on a short conversation in whispers.

"You are a milksop, young Dean," remarked "Hawk-eye" encouragingly. "What did you and Mobsley want to go and faint for ? I didn't."

"Is Mobsley ill ?"

"No, he's all right, only they've sent him to bed."

“Was the man he hit killed?”

“No, only stunned; he came round all right. If he'd recovered before help came, he'd have cooked my goose, I expect.”

“Then they have caught the robbers? Tell me just what happened.”

“Why, after you'd gone I told Brewer if he moved I'd fire. That first bullet chipped his ear; he thought I'd done it on purpose, and he was in such a funk he simply grovelled on the floor, and didn't dare to stir an inch. I stood there for what seemed an hour, and thought help would never come. Then I heard footsteps on the path, and I tell you I could have shrieked for joy. I say, I never thought much of old Mark before; but he pranced into that kitchen in fine style, and went for Brewer like a lion. They soon had him handcuffed, and let old Greenaway loose; and when the bobby saw that other chap's face, he said, ‘Why, this must be the man they call “Soapy Sam;” and if so, he's been wanted by the police for over twelve months.’ And then—but Miss Trigg's coming back; you'll hear all about it to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XX.

HOW FRASER FOUNDED THE CRICKET CLUB.

NEVER in the whole history of Hanover House had there been such a breaking-up day as that memorable Friday which followed the events recorded in the previous chapter. All thought of work was out of the question. Fraser, Mobsley, and I were, of course, regarded as heroes by all our companions ; in fact, in Stockingham itself we became the men of the hour.

So much fuss was made over us that long before the day was out we were heartily sick of the very mention of the robbery. The boys cheered and carried us round the playground on their shoulders ; the magistrate before whom we had to give evidence congratulated us on our conduct ; the police inspector patted us on the shoulder ; and a representative of *The Stockingham Observer* interviewed us, and made nearly a

whole column of “copy” out of our bashful statements regarding the previous evening’s exploits.

At the police-court, and also later on at the assizes (where we again appeared as witnesses), we learned the whole story of the crime. The policeman’s conjecture proved correct: the stranger was “Soapy Sam,” a notorious housebreaker; and what surprised us still more, Brewer was recognized as a confederate of the former. Our old enemy, whose real name was Rapson, had been obliged to “lie low” for a time, and by means of a forged character had succeeded in getting his situation with Mr. Greenaway.

It was “Soapy Sam” who broke into Sir John Aberton’s mansion, and being unable at the time to dispose of the plunder, Brewer had helped him to conceal it by burying it inside our shrubbery. “Sam” was not altogether pleased with the hiding-place, and it was when looking for a better that he had appeared to us in the loft. He it was whom I encountered on the Fifth of November, when he must have been paying the shrubbery a visit to make sure that the treasure was still safe.

Though we three had dug in several places, we had failed to light on the exact spot where the rest of the silver had been deposited, so it remained undiscovered.

As the time went on, Brewer determined to return to his old haunts, and formed the project of robbing old Greenaway of the many valuables which his house contained. "Soapy Sam" was to assist, and at the same time the buried plate was to be removed, and conveyed to London.

Bowden's random remark about stealing a silver cup had been rather a shock to Brewer; he determined to carry out his project at once, and hence the advertisement in the Agony Column of *The Observer*. How the affair terminated the reader has been already informed. The robbers, I may remark, were each sentenced to a long term of penal servitude.

As regards the matter of our finding and attempting to sell the silver cup, this was soon explained, and we were let off with a very gentle reprimand for not having disclosed the nature of our find. The only thing in connection with this part of the business which was not cleared up immediately was the anonymous letter received by the police. Mr. Medlar must have had his suspicions, and these were confirmed by the fact that Hannah had seen the two boys returning from the post. We heard nothing of this at the time; but neither Bowden nor Simpson returned to the school after the Christmas holidays. And it was well

for them that they did not ; for when the story of their treachery was made known, it roused such a feeling of indignation against them, that had they been there in the flesh they would probably have been forced to run the gauntlet under still sterner conditions than on the previous occasion.

But the tale of our triumph is not yet ended ; in fact, by far the most important part of it still remains to be told.

On Friday afternoon Fraser, Mobsley, and I were with Mr. Medlar in the study, when Mr. Greenaway was announced. The old gentleman came in, twirling his big hat in his usual fussy manner.

“ I hope, sir, that I am not intruding on your time,” he began ; “ but after what has happened I really felt—” He stopped short : glancing round the room, his eye had lighted on a little glass case containing some shells and fossils, which stood close by on a side table. He bent down over it, and then raised his hands, exclaiming, “ Goodness me ! this must be the Amphitherium. I’d no idea you were a collector, sir.”

“ I have never had much time for geological work,” replied Mr. Medlar ; “ but being once in the Stonesfield neighbourhood, I had the good fortune to find this specimen in the oolitic slate. I am aware that but

few examples have been found, but I believe the number is quite sufficient to demonstrate the existence of a mammiferous quadruped at the same time as the belemnites, buprestis, and pleiosaurus of this early palaeontological period. I am not aware whether the authorities are yet agreed in regarding the animal as a marsupial or as an insectivorous placental."

"My dear sir," spluttered Mr. Greenaway, "it is a pleasure to meet you. Dear me! I'd no idea of this. We must see more of each other. You are most fortunate in possessing such a good specimen of the *Amphitherium*. I've tried for a long time to get one for my collection, but have been unable to do so."

"Then allow me to offer you this one," answered Mr. Medlar. "If you will accept it, I shall—"

"Oh no!" interrupted the visitor; "do you really mean it? This is really most kind of you, most generous; we must really see more of each other in the future. If ever I can be of any service to you—Ah, that reminds me: I want a word with these young gentlemen."

"Hawk-eye," "Chingachgook," and myself had up to the present been merely astonished spectators of this burying of the hatchet; now we found ourselves called upon to take part in the ceremony.

“I am really at a loss to express my sense of gratitude for what you did last night,” continued the speaker, turning towards us. “Really, if it had not been for your gallant conduct in attacking those infamous scoundrels, I believe they would have murdered me in cold blood. I want to know in what manner I can show my appreciation of your conduct. If you will make some suggestion, I shall be most grateful.”

We stared at each other in silence; then suddenly Fraser’s face brightened.

“Please, sir,” he began, “there is one thing we should like you to do.”

“And what’s that?”

“We should be glad if you’d take back Dick Adams. He’s very hard up, sir, and he’d be very thankful to get the place again.”

“So he shall,” answered Mr. Greenaway. “I’ll send for him at once. But I want to know what I can do for *you*. Come, speak out, my boy; don’t be afraid.”

“Well, there’s one thing we should like, if it’s not asking too much,” continued Fraser. “We should be very much obliged if you’d lend us your field to play cricket in sometimes.”

“Capital!” cried the old gentleman; “you shall have it all the year round.—Mr. Medlar,” he continued,

seeing that the head-master was about to interpose some remark, "you must really permit me to place my field at the disposal of your boys. I beg you to grant me this as a favour.—What's that you say? Rent? My dear sir, don't mention it; if you refer to the subject again, I shall really be offended."

Half an hour later we had retired upstairs to commence packing, when Miss Trigg rushed into the room in a state of great excitement.

"Quick, you three boys! wash your hands, brush your hair, put on clean collars and your Sunday coats. Sir John Aberton has called, and wants to see you."

I had never spoken to a live baronet before, and half expected to see somebody in armour, instead of the jolly red-faced gentleman who stood laughing and talking to Mr. Medlar when we entered the drawing-room. Sir John was highly pleased at the discovery of his plate. He questioned us as to every detail connected with the robbery, and at the conclusion of the story shook hands with us all round, pronounced us "three bricks," and invited us to come and see him at Vanston Hall.

"And now there's one thing we haven't spoken about," he remarked. "I feel very much indebted to you boys. If it hadn't been for you, I should probably

never have seen any of my silver again. Now the question is, what can I do for you in return?"

We blushed, and Mobsley stammered something about our not wanting any return.

"Oh, come!" retorted the baronet. "If you won't tell me, I shall have to take the matter into my own hands."

Then Fraser once more found his tongue.

"There's one thing we should like, sir: we're going to start a cricket club next year, and perhaps you'd be our president."

"I should be delighted," answered the other; "I've always been fond of the game."

"Really, Sir John, this is very kind," said Mr. Medlar. "Permit me to observe that having your name connected in any way with the school is a great honour."

"Not at all!" returned the visitor. "Have you boys got your outfit yet?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, I shall send it you—bats, stumps, practice-net, and everything you require. No, no thanks; the obligation is all on my side, and I'm only too glad to have found some way of expressing my gratitude."

When we got out into the passage, Fraser went over

to the stairs, and solemnly stood on his head on the bottom step. Then he got up and executed a war-dance.

“I say!” he exclaimed, “we’ve got it all at last—the whole thing: first the field, and now all the tools; and I’ll bet you Sir John will send the best that are made.”

Tea was just over, when we three were sent for again, and there in the hall stood Dick Adams; not the disheartened, dead-beat Dick Adams as we had last seen him, but the Dick Adams of former times, bright and neat as a brass button.

“Hallo, Dick! are you back again already?”

“Yes, sir, thanks to you young gentlemen. The master sent me round to give you these, and to ask you to accept ‘em as a Christmas box.” As he spoke he handed us three envelopes. Mobsley opened his first.

“My eye!” he exclaimed. “It’s a Bank of England note—*five pounds!*”

“So’s mine!” I gasped.

“And so’s mine!” echoed Fraser. “I say, we ought not to take all this money.”

“Go on!” answered Dick Adams. “I only wish I was rich, and I’d give you the same, and that wouldn’t be near enough for what you’ve done for me.”

We promptly fell on Dick, and a moment or so later he beat a hasty retreat, wishing us a merry Christmas—a greeting which we as heartily returned.

Up on the third landing there were great doings that night. The place was strewn with bits of paper, box cords, and other signs of packing up. Everybody made speeches in turn. “Romulus” and “Remus” forbore to quarrel, and “Gentle Spring” came out strongly, and actually sang a song.

The only thing that tended to cast a gloom over the proceedings was the thought that Fraser was leaving. We each gave him a keepsake. The Joneses presented their soap-apple, Gale the puzzle matchbox, and Spring the wooden idol (whose eye, we discovered, was not a ruby after all). I had nothing better to give than my bent halfpenny, and Mobsley’s offering was the stone that looked like a toe; but “Hawk-eye” assured us he should keep them always, to remind him of the “Mohicans.”

“I wish you weren’t going,” sighed “Romulus.”

“Yes, so do I,” returned the Scout. “Never mind; you fellows will have the field next year.”

“But you won’t be here,” I said bitterly.

“It doesn’t matter,” answered Fraser. “I set my

heart on getting a cricket club for this place, and now I've done it, and I'm satisfied!"

* * * * *

In due time the club was started. Mr. Greenaway kept his promise about the field, and Sir John Aberton sent us a splendid outfit of cricketing requisites.

But the person to whom we owed all this had no share in its enjoyment. Our beloved "Hawk-eye" never took part in a single game, not even when we beat the Grammar School 3rd Eleven by three wickets and twenty runs.

I thought it hard at the time, but have since found that in the big world itself the same thing not infrequently happens.

Some sow that others may reap.

THE END.

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